

Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

July 2025



CENTRALINA
REGIONAL COUNCIL



Thank you to our digital partners!

We extend our sincere appreciation to the partners and collaborators who played a key role in shaping Digital Opportunity Plans across the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) region. Thank you to the community members, local leaders, emergency management directors and partner organizations in each county who contributed to the development of the Regional Digital Opportunity Plan. Your insights, commitment and local leadership were essential in creating strategies that reflect the unique needs and opportunities of our region.

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Powered by Centralina

This Regional Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled [Centralina Regional Council](#) (Centralina) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership to develop DOPs with Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Rowan and Union counties. Centralina also extended DOP implementation and public safety communication for Stanly and Mecklenburg counties to ensure continuity across the region where possible and especially to support public safety communication needs. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital hub at centralina.org/digital, Centralina is helping communities take action to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.



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Setting the Digital Scene

In today's rapidly evolving digital environment, access to technology is essential for education, employment, healthcare, civic engagement and emergency preparedness. The Centralina region recognizes that digital readiness is a critical factor in ensuring individuals and communities can thrive.

A Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is a strategic roadmap that identifies local needs and outlines actions to improve internet access, digital skills, device availability and technology to support public safety communications. It brings together partners across sectors to expand digital readiness and ensure communities are equipped to thrive in an increasingly connected world.

This plan outlines a regional strategy to address four key goals: improving digital literacy, increasing affordability of the internet and devices, expanding device access and strengthening public safety through digital preparedness. These goals were informed by the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) State DOP and further refined to meet the unique needs and conditions of the Centralina region both pre- and post-tropical storm Helene.

1. Digital literacy is the ability to use technology effectively and safely, including navigating websites, sending emails, using applications and understanding online security.
2. Access means having reliable, high-speed internet and functional devices, such as laptops, tablets or smartphones that enable participation in everyday life and support economic mobility.
3. Affordability focuses on reducing the cost barriers to obtaining both internet service and devices, helping households stay connected without financial strain.
4. Public safety preparedness ensures that residents, local governments and emergency services can communicate, respond and recover effectively using digital tools before, during and after a hazard event.

Centralina is taking an action-oriented approach to help residents and communities overcome digital barriers and build the skills, access and preparedness needed to succeed in a technology-driven world.

Vision for a Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

To ensure that all residents in the Centralina region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure needed to participate fully in the digital world, supporting thriving communities, resilient systems and greater economic prosperity for all.

Strategic Mission

To develop a coordinated regional strategy that supports counties with strategic partners and implementation metrics that will advance digital literacy and skills, expand broadband quality and affordability, enhance access to reliable devices and better integrate digital readiness into public safety and emergency preparedness efforts.

Objectives

- **County-Level Planning:** Partner with Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Rowan and Union counties to develop tailored Digital Opportunity Plans. Support Stanly County in implementing its plan. Conduct public safety survey on communication needs and current conditions with all nine Centralina counties in response to Tropical Storm Helene findings about digital communication limitations related to the hazard.
- **Regional Resource Hub:** Create a centralized, web-based platform to house county-level plans, digital access resources, strategic partners and implementation metrics to support seamless navigation and collaboration across jurisdictions.
- **Community Engagement:** Conduct surveys, focus groups and outreach campaigns to better understand local needs and promote awareness of digital resources. Develop a regional digital resource interface to assist residents and stakeholders with available services.
- **Grant Compliance & Tracking:** Meet all reporting requirements outlined in the Building a New Digital Economy in NC (BAND-NC) grant program guidelines, including timely documentation of outcomes and progress benchmarks.

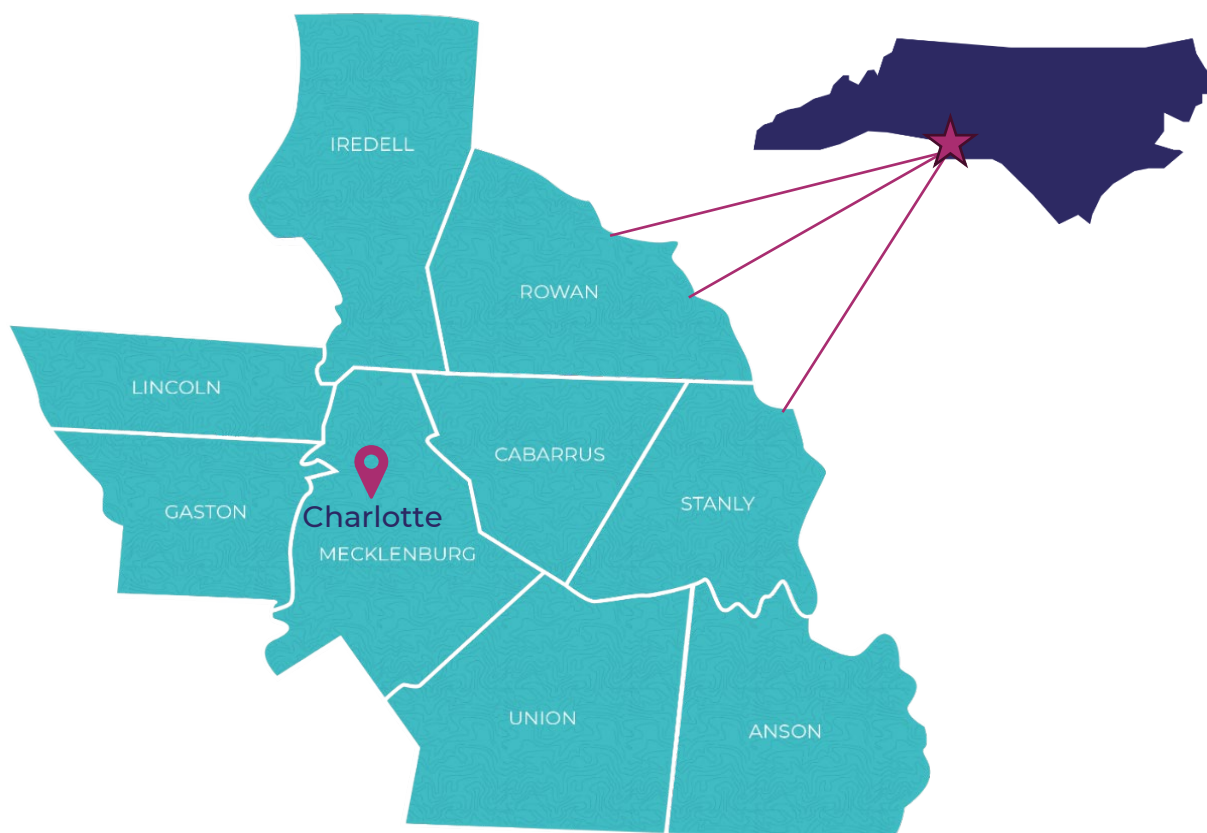
Through this plan, Centralina is strengthening local capacity, reducing known access gaps and empowering residents, community stakeholders and governments alike to be better prepared for an increasingly digital future.

Please note that this regional strategic plan, the county plans, the digital resource appendices and the Centralina Regional DOP Hub serve as a suite of components to enable individuals, communities and local and county leaders to continue to bolster and monitor their success in closing the digital divide.

About the Centralina Region

The Centralina region is located in the Piedmont of North Carolina, bordering South Carolina, and encompasses nine counties that form part of the Charlotte Metropolitan area: Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union. This diverse region is marked by a mix of rural, suburban and urban communities, each with its own economic priorities, community assets and digital challenges.

Since the early 1990s, the region has seen consistent growth in both population and local economies. However, beginning around 2010, growth patterns became more uneven, with some areas developing quickly while others continued to experience challenges related to infrastructure and limited availability of essential services. In 2017, new interest and investment began to focus on older suburban areas and communities that had previously received less support, signaling a wider effort to strengthen these areas through communication infrastructure improvements and expanded digital access opportunities.



Understanding the Centralina Region's Digital Landscape

To make informed decisions and effectively plan for digital expansion, it's important to understand how internet access, device availability and related challenges vary across the Centralina region. One tool used to assess these differences is the Digital Divide Index (DDI), developed by the Purdue Center for Regional Development under the leadership of Dr. Roberto Gallardo, Vice President for Engagement. The DDI provides a data-driven framework to evaluate both infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions that influence digital access. It helps to identify counties where the need for investment is highest, allowing communities to target strategies that close digital gaps and expand participation in the digital economy.

The DDI assigns a score from 0 to 100 for each county. Higher scores indicate a greater need for improvements in internet service, device ownership and the ability to fully participate in a connected society. Across the region, many counties show elevated scores, pointing to gaps in digital readiness. Mecklenburg County, with lower scores, reflects a different focus, where the priority is strengthening digital skills and usage rather than basic infrastructure needs.

The DDI uses ten indicators, grouped into two categories:

Infrastructure and Adoption:

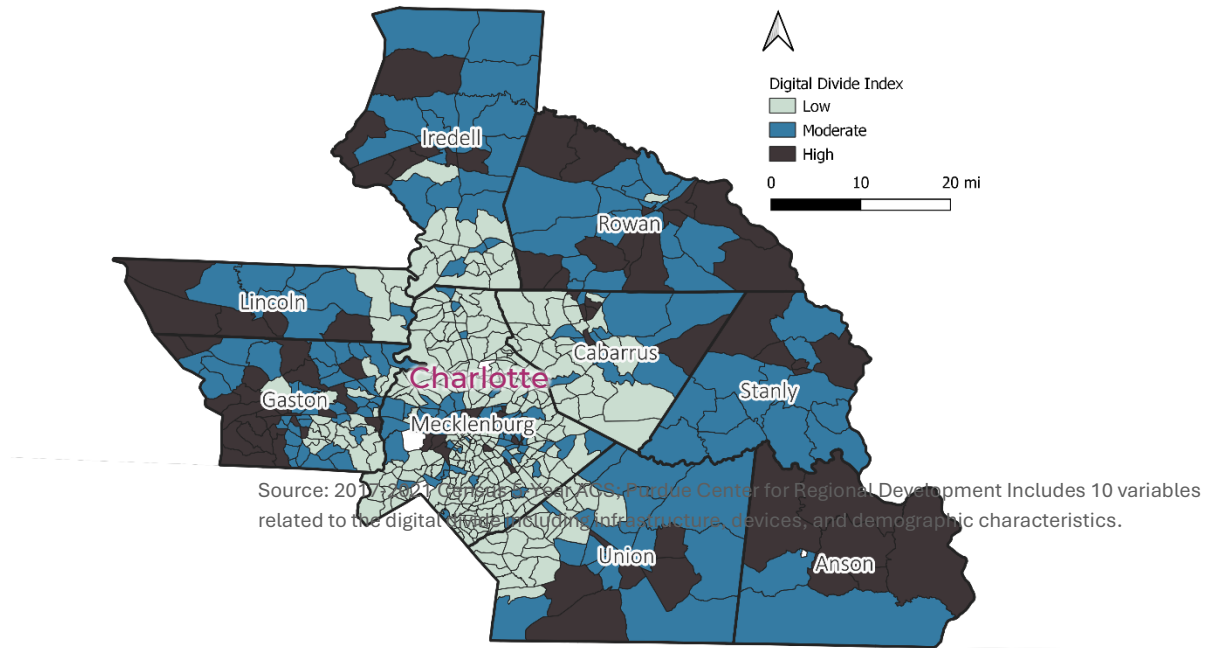
1. Households without a computer, tablet or smartphone
2. Households without any internet subscription (including mobile data)
3. Average download speed (Mbps), based on speed test data
4. Average upload speed (Mbps), based on speed test data

Economic and Demographic Conditions:

5. Share of residents aged 65 and over
6. Adults over 25 without a high school diploma
7. Individuals below the poverty threshold
8. Residents not living in institutions who report physical limitations
9. An internet-to-income ratio that reflects cost as a challenge
10. Share of households receiving assistance such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or classified as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)

These factors help guide regional efforts and ensure planning addresses the right mix of service needs, whether that means expanding internet networks, improving affordability, increasing access to functional devices or building practical digital skills that support everyday tasks and emergency preparedness.

Percent Households with a High Digital Divide

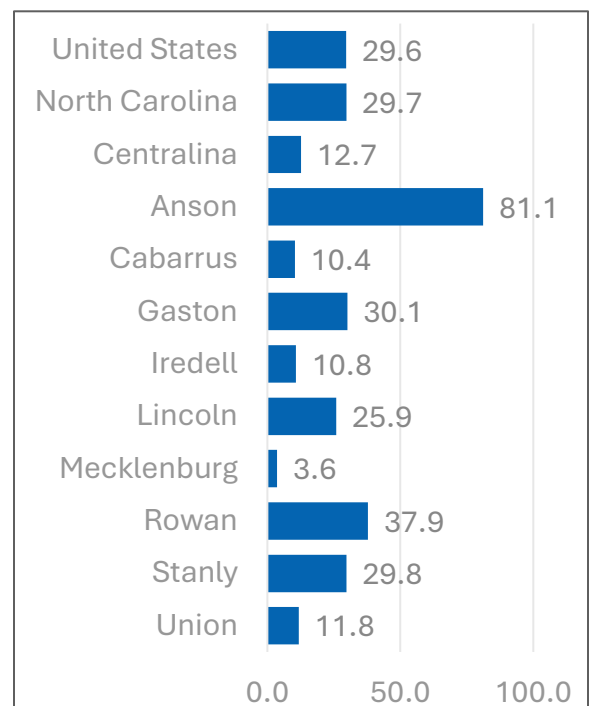


This diagram illustrates the Digital Divide Index (DDI) across the Centralina region. The bar chart shows the percentage of households with elevated digital access challenges in each county, compared to state and national averages. The accompanying map highlights where gaps in internet service and technology readiness are most concentrated.

Higher values on the chart indicate a greater number of households facing issues, such as limited internet connections or lack of functional digital devices.

Map shading reflects DDI levels:

- Light = Lower digital divide
- Medium = Moderate
- Dark = Higher



Anson County (81.1%) and Rowan County (37.9%) represent areas with the most pressing needs, while Mecklenburg County (3.6%) shows relatively fewer issues—shifting the priority there to improving digital skills and daily use of available resources.

Why Digital Opportunity Planning Matters

Digital opportunity planning is essential to strengthening communities across the Centralina region. As technology becomes central to public services, education, business and emergency response, local governments play a key role in ensuring residents and communities can access the tools and skills needed to stay connected and thrive.

Federal and state programs increasingly support local efforts to expand broadband, improve affordability, increase device access and build digital skills. By leading this work locally, Centralina communities can advance infrastructure, public service delivery, economic mobility options and regional growth coordination.

Supporting Infrastructure

Reliable broadband and access to functional devices are critical components of modern infrastructure. Understanding where gaps exist allows local governments to make informed investments that strengthen connectivity and improve quality of life.

Expanding Access to Public Services

Access to technology directly impacts residents' ability to engage with essential services, such as education, health care, public safety emergency alerts and job opportunities. Digital Opportunity Plans help communities close the gaps in availability, affordability and skills so that more residents can benefit from these services.

Driving Economic Development

The [Centralina Economic Development District](#) (EDD), operated under the umbrella of the Centralina Regional Council, plays a key role in advancing long-term regional prosperity. It is guided by the [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS), a five-year roadmap for promoting job creation, business expansion and infrastructure investment across the region. A core focus of the CEDS is improving digital infrastructure as a pathway to economic mobility. It recognizes that access to high-speed internet, modern devices and practical digital skills is essential to strengthening the regional workforce, supporting business growth and ensuring that all communities, both urban and rural, can access the tools needed to compete in a digital economy.

Despite regional economic growth, service gaps remain. For example, only 11.8% of Anson County residents have access to internet speeds that meet modern standards of 100/20 Mbps benchmark, speeds essential for completing job applications, remote work and

completing online forms and registrations. Expanding access and improving digital readiness are critical to supporting workforce training, entrepreneurship and innovation, especially in areas with greater service needs.

Strengthening Community Engagement

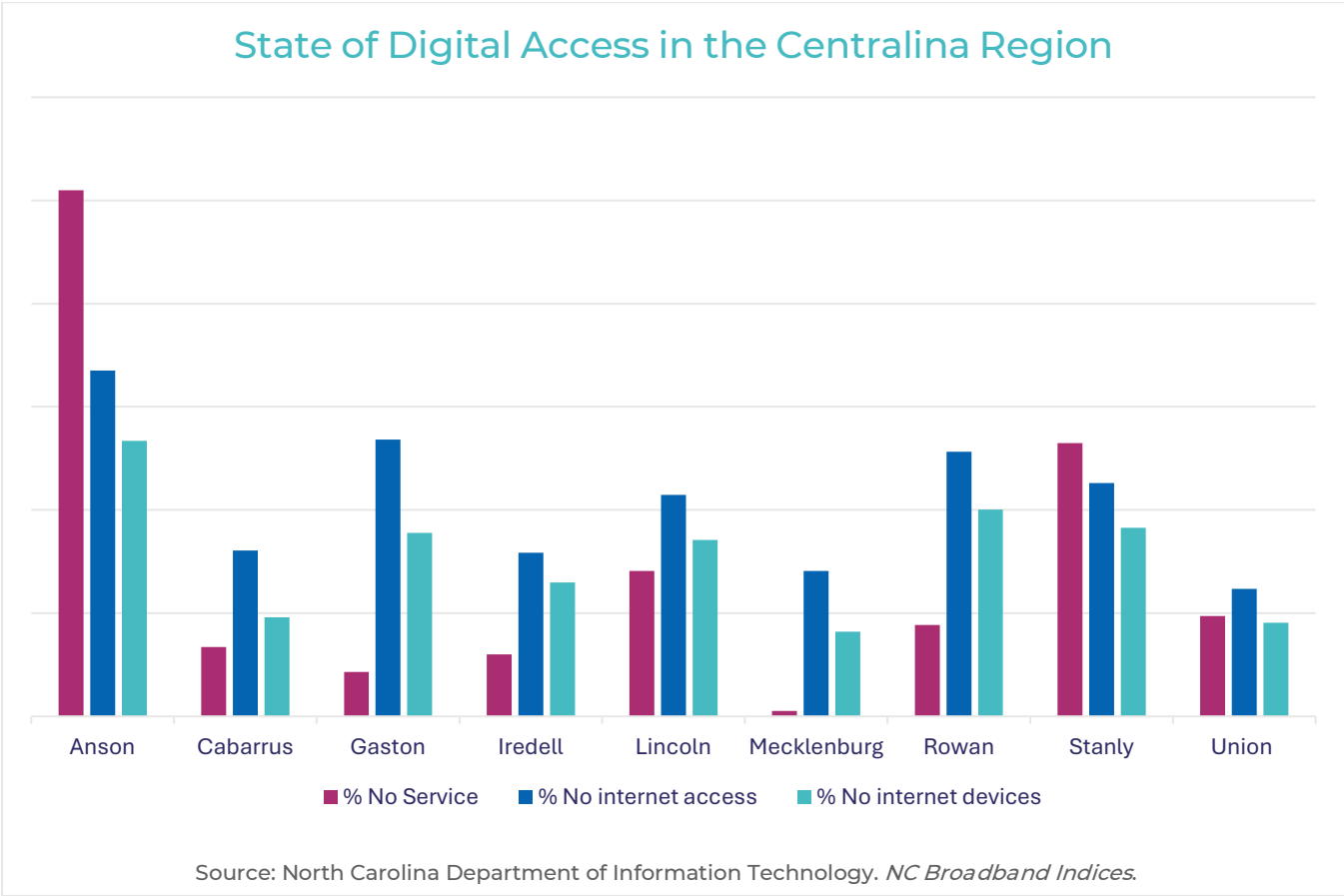
Improved access and digital literacy enable broader participation in the community. Local governments can better communicate with residents and gather input, leading to more effective decisions and stronger community relationships.

Building Partnerships

Effective digital opportunity planning depends on collaboration. Local governments benefit from working with businesses, nonprofits, schools, health care providers and emergency services. These partnerships expand capacity and ensure that digital strategies align with broader community needs.

Digital Opportunity in the Centralina Region

To better understand where support is most needed, Centralina adopted a coordinated approach to identify shared priorities and local differences in internet availability, usage and supporting resources. Data from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) Broadband Availability Index shows that approximately 10% of the Centralina region lacks reliable internet access. This gap is more evident in certain rural counties, where digital infrastructure deployment is limited and costs are higher due to lower population density.



This chart provides a high-level view of key challenges related to internet service across the region. It displays three main indicators:

- The share of households that have limited or no provider offering internet at or above the recommended speed of 100/20 Mbps - % No service
- The percentage of households that have no available options for connecting to the internet at a given location - % No internet access

- The portion of households without equipment capable of connecting to the internet
- % No internet devices

Anson County faces the most significant access challenges in the region due to its designation as a Tier 1 rural county, ongoing population decline and lower household incomes. Limited provider competition can drive up costs and with the highest percentage of households lacking service availability and among the highest for both no internet access and no internet devices. This underscores the need for more targeted investment to improve connectivity and support economic mobility.

In addition to infrastructure and device access, certain groups may find it more difficult to stay connected. Within the nine-county region:

- 7% of residents are veterans
- 40% are age 65 or older
- 12% live below the poverty line
- 13% report mobility or health-related conditions
- 11% live in households where English is not the primary language

These populations may require tailored support to fully use available technology and online services.

Broadband Availability Across the Centralina Region

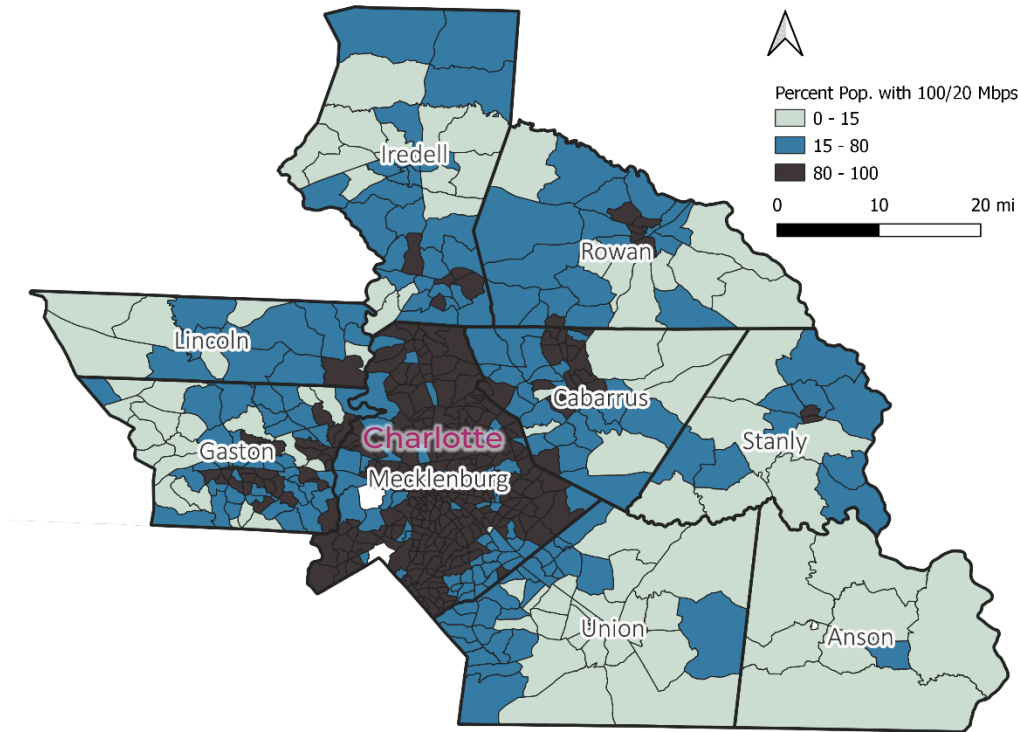
High-speed internet is essential for participating in today's economy, accessing education and staying connected during emergencies. The availability of broadband at speeds of 100/20 Mbps, a commonly accepted threshold for reliable service, varies widely across the Centralina region.

The data show that Mecklenburg County leads the region with the highest level of coverage, with 90.8% of its population having access to these speeds. Cabarrus (63.2%), Gaston (56.5%), and the region overall (66.8%) also perform above the national (56.7%) and state (50.9%) averages.

In contrast, the counties of Anson (11.8%), Union (29.3%), Stanly (33.4%), Lincoln (38.7%), Rowan (38.7%) and Iredell (41.4%) lag behind, reflecting significant gaps in broadband infrastructure. These figures indicate that many of their residents may face limitations when attempting to use online tools for work, education, healthcare or daily and public safety communication needs.

The following map reinforces this trend by shading areas based on the percentage of the population with access limited to 100/20Mbps:

Percent Population with 100/20 Mbps

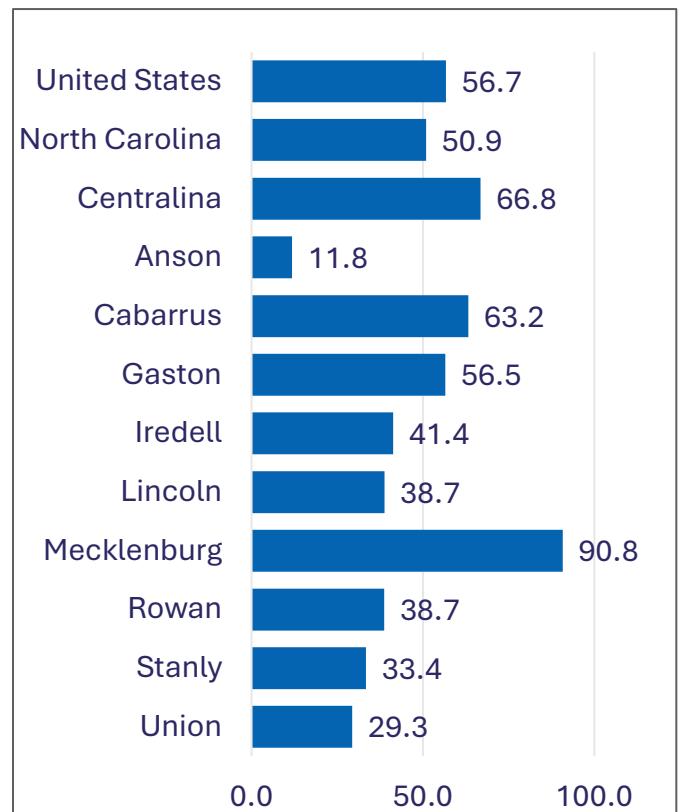


Source: Federal Communications Commission Form 477
December 2021; Q1-Q4 2021 Speedtest® by Ookla® Global

- Light: 0–15% access
- Medium: 15–80% access
- Dark 80–100% access

While large portions of Mecklenburg County and its urban core are shaded black, much of the surrounding region remains light green or teal, showing that faster internet is still not widely available in many parts of the region.

In addition to limited access speeds, residents in more rural areas often have fewer broadband choices. FCC data from 2021 indicates that in Anson, Union, Gaston and Lincoln counties, many households have only one or no provider options offering 100/20 Mbps service. Even in more developed counties like Rowan, Iredell and Mecklenburg, there are Census tracts where residents face similarly limited provider choice. The rural nature of much of the region, with nearly 47%



of land classified as rural (American Community Survey, 2022), continues to impact the availability and competitiveness of broadband services.

Available Broadband Access Providers

The following providers deliver broadband services across the Centralina region, offering varying speeds and service areas.

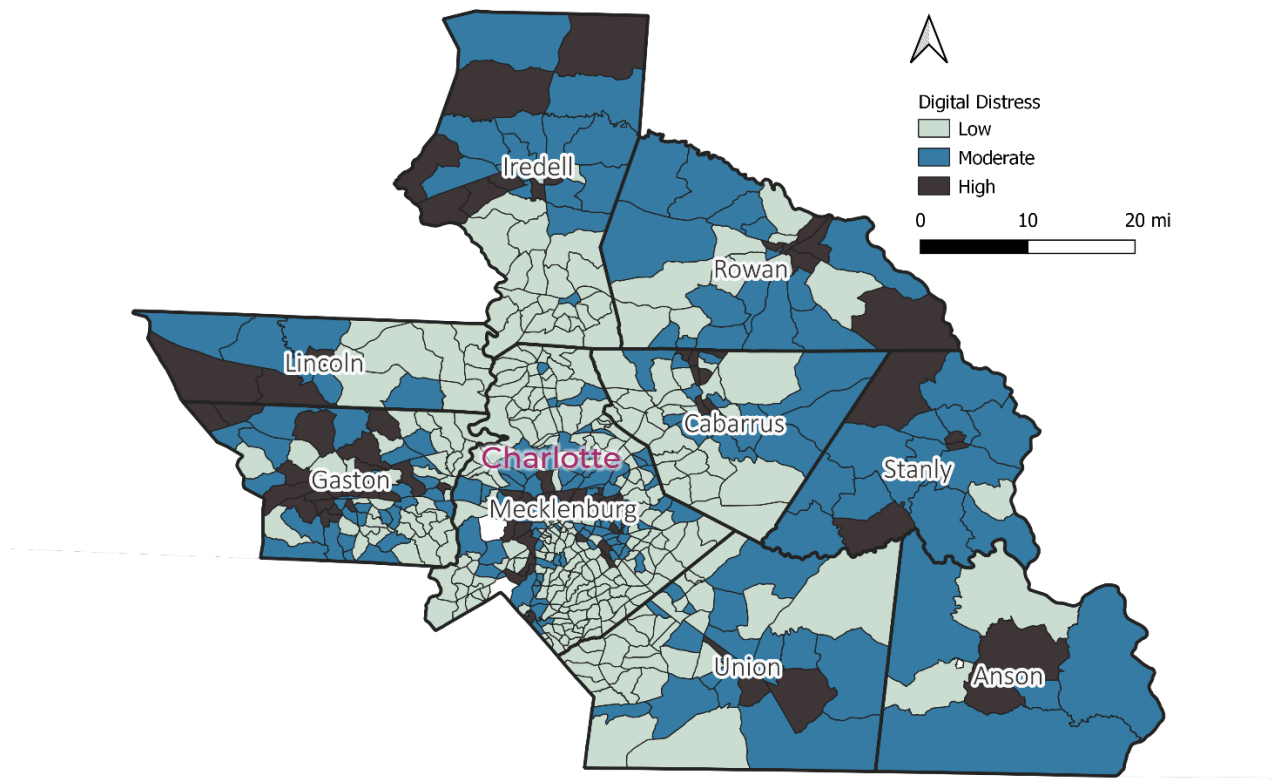
AT&T	Google Fiber	T-Mobile
Charter Communications	Hotwire Communications	TDS Telecom
Clear Internet Services	Hughs Net	Verizon
Comporium, Inc.	OpenBroadband, LLC	Windstream
Copley Internet Systems	Open Fiber USA	
Frontier Communications	RiverStreet Network	

Digital Distress Across the Centralina Region

While broadband availability is a key measure of digital access, having infrastructure alone does not guarantee that residents are fully connected. Digital distress refers to households that either have no internet subscription, rely solely on cellular data for access or lack computing devices beyond mobile phones. These conditions limit a household’s ability to participate in the digital economy.

Across the Centralina region, most areas experience relatively low levels of digital distress. However, pockets of high distress are present in every county, highlighting ongoing challenges to achieving universal digital access.

The map below categorizes census tracts based on the degree of digital distress:



Source: 2017-2021 Census 5-Year ACS; Purdue Center for Regional Development, December 2021

- Light: Low levels of distress
- Medium: Moderate levels of distress
- Dark: High levels of distress

While urbanized areas, particularly in Mecklenburg County, generally show lower distress levels, there are significant clusters of high digital distress scattered throughout more rural parts of Anson, Stanly, Gaston, Lincoln and Iredell counties. These areas reflect households that, even if broadband is technically available, may lack the means, devices or data plans needed to fully benefit from digital connectivity.

Digital Access in Support of Emergency Management and Public Safety

Access to technology plays a critical role in keeping communities safe and connected during emergencies. When people are able to receive alerts, check for updates and reach emergency services quickly, they are better prepared to respond and protect lives and

community assets. However, some households still lack the tools or knowledge to take full advantage of these systems.

Many residents across the region, including older adults, veterans, residents in rural areas and households that experience language limitations, may not be enrolled in local government alert systems, or may not fully understand where to access or how to use them. Strong public safety systems depend on reliable digital access, yet many residents are unfamiliar with automated alerts sent by text, phone or email. Ensuring everyone can understand, benefit from this information and use these tools is an essential part of digital planning. Reaching these residents, businesses and communities with the right tools, information and support services strengthens emergency response efforts and saves lives.

Connecting Public Safety and Digital Access

With support from Centralina, AT&T and the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT), public safety is now an eligible focus area under the Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant Program. This allows counties to include emergency alert education and access efforts in their digital opportunity work.

The North Carolina Emergency Alert System (EAS) helps broadcast critical updates from state and local officials. It works in partnership with the National Weather Service to send alerts on local radio, television and weather radios. All counties in the Centralina region are covered by one or more National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio stations, which can be accessed even during power or internet outages.

The EAS is a nationwide tool designed to deliver timely and accurate information during emergencies. Whether it's a severe storm, wildfire or other public safety threat, the EAS helps keep residents informed by sending alerts through familiar channels like radio, television and weather radios. Here's how the system works across North Carolina and in the Centralina region:

Emergency Alert System Quick Facts

- **Priority System:** National alerts take top priority, followed by state and local messages.
- **Multiple Channels:** Alerts are shared through FM and AM radio, cable TV, satellite radio and weather radio stations.
- **Local Monitoring:** Each county's emergency broadcasts are connected to designated LP-1 and LP-2 radio stations, which serve as the primary and backup channels for delivering EAS messages.

Emergency Communications Across Centralina

Residents in the Charlotte and Statesville areas are served by local LPFM stations that broadcast EAS alerts. Key NOAA weather radio frequencies in the region include 162.475 MHz and 162.500 MHz. These stations help with relay alerts even if other services go offline.

Each county also maintains its own wireless emergency alert system, which residents can sign up for online. For more on individual county wireless alert efforts, see *Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access* within each county's digital opportunity plan.

Reaching Every Household

Many counties are already taking steps to help residents stay informed. Local libraries, senior centers and nonprofits offer workshops on how to receive alerts and what to do in an emergency. Counties, like Anson and Union, work with emergency management teams to increase enrollment in local alert systems and distribute information at public events. Others, like Cabarrus, use their Public Education Government (PEG) television channels and social media platforms to promote their alert systems.

While these efforts increase participation, multilingual alerting remains limited. According to recent data:

- Less than 2% of North Carolina alert providers currently offer messages in a language other than English
- Nearly 11% of households in the region speak English as a second language, highlighting a key area for enhancement needs

Opportunities for Counties

Some ways counties can strengthen emergency communications and digital readiness by:

- Hosting community workshops that walk residents through signing up for local alerts
- Partnering with trusted organizations to help older adults and rural residents access NOAA weather radios
- Ensuring public Wi-Fi sites display emergency instructions during outages
- Exploring funding for smart signage or bilingual messaging tools

Connectivity Resilience

Emergency alert systems rely on stable digital infrastructure. During severe storms or power outages, backup communication paths such as weather radios, satellite alerts and public Wi-Fi with offline message boards can help maintain access to critical updates. Counties can strengthen resilience by investing in battery-powered routers, mobile signal boosters for first responders and redundant alerting methods that reach residents through both digital and analog tools.

Regional Analysis of Public Safety Priorities in Hazard Mitigation Plans

Centralina compiled and reviewed Hazard Mitigation Plans (HMP) from across its nine-county region to compare public safety-related action items and identify shared priorities.

This regional analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of how local governments are addressing hazard preparedness and emergency communication. Several themes emerged regarding the highest priorities and regional focus areas, including a strong emphasis on public education, flood risk awareness and weather-related hazard alerts. The findings highlight both common strengths and recurring gaps, such as limited redundancy and challenges in reaching digitally or linguistically isolated populations that inform opportunities for more coordinated and comprehensive public safety planning across the region.

Highest Priorities Across Counties

Of the 218 action items reviewed, 102 were designated as high priority (46.8%). These high-priority actions consistently emphasized:

Public Education (70 mentions): Outreach campaigns, training sessions and preparedness information were the most frequently cited strategies, often targeting severe weather events and natural disasters.

Weather-related Hazards (47 mentions): Many counties prioritized preparation and awareness for hurricanes, tornadoes, thunderstorms and winter storms.

Flood Risk (35 mentions): Updating floodplain maps, promoting flood insurance and increasing public awareness of flood-prone zones were repeatedly noted.

Community Awareness (23 mentions): Campaigns aimed at improving overall readiness and understanding of hazards.

Emergency Alerts and Radios (14 mentions each): Expanding the use of weather alert radios and improving mass communication systems remain top priorities.

Additional Findings

Deferred Actions: 11.5% of action items were marked as deferred, indicating a gap between planning and execution due to resource limitations or interagency coordination issues.

Minimal Redundancy: Only 0.5% of items were labelled redundant. This suggests limited overlap but also a potential need to build intentional redundancy into systems for reliability.

Vulnerable Populations: While not always specifically named in action titles, many education-focused actions aim to reach seniors, non-English speakers and people with limited digital literacy.

Public Safety Communication Methods

Across the Centralina region, local governments use a core set of communication tools to educate residents and deliver emergency alerts. Common methods include real-time updates on social media during hazard events, automated notifications through platforms like CodeRED, printed outreach materials distributed in libraries and government buildings and televised updates on public education and government access (PEG) channels. These

tools are supported by interagency coordination among emergency management, public health and planning departments, forming an integrated communication system that keeps communities informed and prepared.

Implications for the Regional Report

This analysis shows that counties are aligned around awareness, outreach and equitable access to hazard information, but that implementation capacity and infrastructure limitations, especially alerts and communication tools, are consistent barriers. Prioritizing funding, regional coordination and public safety technology will be essential to move high-priority Hazard Mitigation Plan priorities into action.

Emergency Managers Survey Summary

Centralina conducted a regional survey of emergency managers in February 2025 to better understand public safety alert systems, communication equipment and outreach to vulnerable populations. Responses were collected from all nine counties in the region. Key findings include:

Redundancy in Emergency Communications: While some counties reported having full redundancy in place, others indicate they only have partial backup systems. All reported variations in the approach between emergency management departments and the need for more equipment and supportive services to meet the increases in population and not hazard events.

Digital Access and Literacy Challenges: Digital access and literacy-limited populations were consistently rated among the least served groups, with most counties rating access between 2 and 3 on a 5-point scale. These gaps highlight the need for stronger outreach strategies and greater systemwide accessibility.

Alert Systems and Technology Use: Common alert platforms include RAVE, CodeRed and Everbridge. Motorola is the most widely used vendor for two-way radio communications. Several counties noted the need for expanded use of satellite phones or Starlink for rural redundancy.

Challenges Impacting Digital Expansion: The most cited challenges were budget constraints, limited staffing and gaps in broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Some counties noted that residents may be less responsive to frequent alerts over time.

Collaborative Approaches to Community Outreach: All counties coordinate with local municipalities, state emergency management and voluntary organizations. Some counties use Access and Functional Needs registries or coordinate with public health departments to better reach residents with specific communication or service needs.

This input from emergency managers in the Centralina region reinforces the need for targeted digital opportunity efforts, cross-sector coordination of messaging and

technology investments tailored to varying levels of readiness and communication infrastructure across counties.

Local Government Call to Action

Local governments have a direct role in strengthening emergency communication efforts. Leaders are encouraged to:

Promote Enrollment: The survey found that many counties depend on voluntary sign-ups for emergency alerts, yet some residents, especially older adults or those with limited digital literacy skills, may not be enrolled. Expanding outreach through trusted community partners and in-person engagement is critical to boosting participation. IN commuter communities, cross-promoting alerts by location, such as home, work, school or family care sites can help residents stay informed wherever they spend time. Making it simple to sign up for multiple alert systems across neighboring areas will further improve reach and relevance.

Translate Key Instructions: Multiple counties noted low accessibility for language-limited populations. Translation of emergency alert instructions into commonly spoken languages would directly respond to this need and support emergency response efforts.

Digital Readiness in Planning: Several counties rated digital access and literacy as 2 or 3 out of 5, reflecting significant barriers. This validates the call to include digital literacy as a core element of emergency response plans, not an afterthought.

Community Collaboration: Some counties are using Access and Functional Needs registries, while others lack similar efforts. This highlights the need to broaden partnerships with libraries, senior centers, schools, social service offices and nonprofit community organizations.

Public Safety Technology Opportunities

Advances in public safety technology offer new ways for counties to communicate and respond. Counties may consider:

- Installing smart sirens or text-to-speech digital signage in public spaces
- Using geo-targeted alerts for specific neighborhoods or hazard zones
- Expanding mobile apps that offer real-time updates in multiple languages
- Testing drone-based delivery of emergency announcements in remote areas

These technologies can enhance public confidence, ensure faster response and reduce risk during emergencies.

Centralina Region: Digital Assets, Opportunities and Implementation Partners

Building on the broadband availability and digital connectivity assessment findings, this section highlights strategies to strengthen digital access across the Centralina region. The information gathered for this section includes all nine counties in the Centralina region: Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union.

Centralina prepared a customized Digital Opportunity Plan for each county, identifying current digital assets, key challenges and strategies to expand internet service, improve digital skills and increase access to devices. These local plans reflect the unique needs and priorities of each community and serve as a north-star guide for implementation metrics for next steps by our county partners.

Each county plan includes a summary of local partner resources that are actively contributing to digital advancement. These resources are presented to encourage peer learning and regional collaboration by sharing promising practices and approaches that may be relevant beyond county lines. The availability and eligibility of specific programs are based on the most current information at the time of publication and may shift over time due to updates in funding, participation or state and federal policy. If funding is available, annual updates to this digital opportunity plan would be a valuable opportunity to support continued assessment and knowledge.

As stated previously, Mecklenburg and Stanly counties developed their own digital access strategies prior to this digital opportunity planning initiative by Centralina. While titled “digital inclusion plans,” these documents align with NCDIT Digital Opportunity Program goals outlined in this report and are incorporated here by reference.

- [Stanly County Digital Inclusion Plan](#): A Framework for Broadband Availability, Access, Affordability and Adoption in Stanly County – April 2022
- [Mecklenburg County Digital Inclusion Plan](#): A Five-Year Plan provided by The Center for Digital Equity – January 2025

Roles and Responsibilities in County Digital Opportunity Plans

To support implementation, each county’s plan includes a set of targeted objectives and action steps organized using the responsible, accountable, support, consulted and informed (RASCI) model. This framework clarifies who leads, supports and monitors each effort.

Role	Definition
Responsible	Party responsible for accomplishing the task(s)
Accountable	Party answerable for the correct and thorough completion of the task(s)
Support	Party providing as-needed assistance in completing task(s)
Consulted	Party engaged in two-way communication with responsible party
Informed	Party kept updated on task(s) through one-way communication

Below is a sample RASCI chart for one objective:

Objective: Increase broadband access to all.			
RASCI: Planning, Guidance & Management	Centralina	Counties	Partners
Understand community broadband needs and assets through data analysis.	Responsible	Accountable	Informed
Connect the community to existing digital skills programs.	Support	Responsible	Support
Establish a regional online repository to centralize county plans and broadband resources.	Responsible	Support	Informed
Strengthen public safety alert systems through expanded communication by county emergency management departments.	Support	Responsible	Informed
Strengthen public safety alert systems by encouraging public enrollment and participation.	Accountable	Accountable	Informed

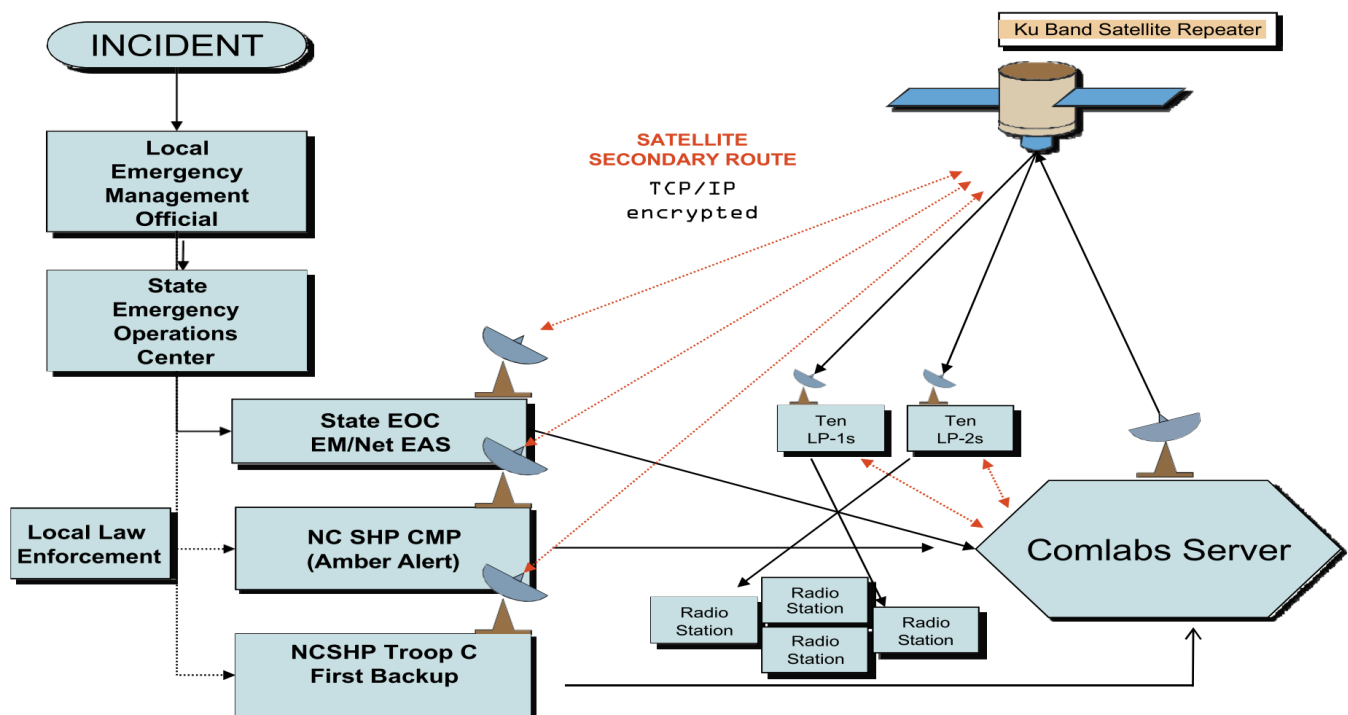
The RASCI structure provides a clear path for action, ensuring that each county's unique digital priorities are supported with coordinated leadership and collaboration.

With this framework in place, the following sections present county-specific digital opportunity plans. Each county profile highlights local assets, identifies key challenges and outlines targeted strategies to strengthen digital access and connectivity across the Centralina region.

Public Safety Communication Asset

The diagram below shows how emergency alerts move through the North Carolina EAS. This system is designed to deliver timely warnings to the public using a reliable network of emergency management officials, radio stations and satellite backups.

When an incident occurs, such as a weather emergency or AMBER Alert, local emergency management officials report the event to the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The State EOC then issues an alert using the Emergency Management Network (EM/Net EAS).



In addition to the State EOC, alerts may also come from:

- Local law enforcement
- The NC State Highway Patrol Command Center (for AMBER Alerts)
- Troop C, which serves as a backup alert center

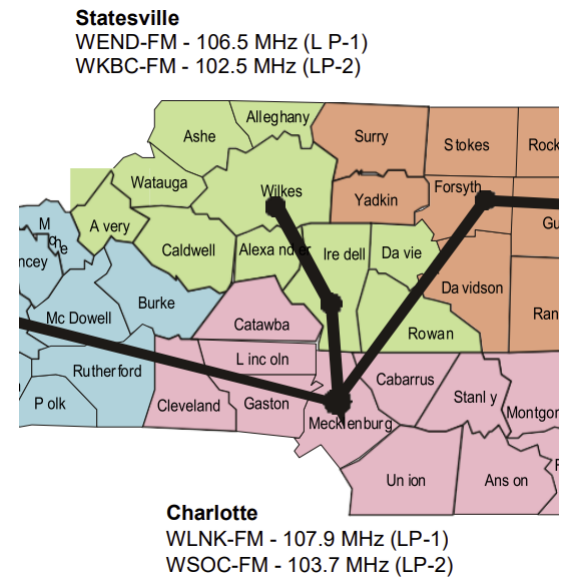
Once the alert is issued, it is sent through several communication paths:

- The primary path goes to designated Local Primary radio stations (called LP-1 and LP-2), which rebroadcast the alerts to local stations

- A backup path sends the alerts via an encrypted satellite connection to ensure alerts are still delivered if other systems are down

The Comlabs Server receives and distributes these messages to radio stations across the region. These stations then broadcast alerts to the public through television, radio and weather radio systems.

This layered communication system ensures that alerts reach residents quickly and reliably, even during major disruptions.



Digital Opportunity Funding Current Conditions

Several counties across the Centralina region have secured digital grants to support broadband expansion, device access and digital skills training. These investments help local governments and partners strengthen connectivity, reach more households and build long-term capacity for digital growth. The list below highlights where grants have been awarded and the types of initiatives they support.

[NCDIT Grant Awardees](#) – The following projects were supported through grant awards from the North Carolina Department of Information, helping counties across the Centralina region expand internet access, increase device availability and strengthen digital skills through targeted local incentives.

Anson	<p>Digital Champion Grant South Piedmont Community College Foundation Expanding internet access, providing digital devices and offering comprehensive digital literacy education to students with the skills needed for success in today's digital world.</p> <p>The Caraway Foundation Addressing the critical gaps in access to technology, internet connectivity, and computer literacy skills by empowering seniors, individuals from low-income and/or rural communities and other marginalized segments utilizing essential resources and comprehensive training.</p> <p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
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Cabarrus	<p>Digital Champion Grant Center for Digital Equity Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.</p> <p>Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant <i>Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline</i> Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.</p> <p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Gaston	<p>Digital Champion Grant TechWorks Gaston Expanding digital literacy services and reaching into rural and isolated communities with high concentrations of individuals lacking reliable broadband and resources to attain digital literacy and tech skills.</p> <p>Center for Digital Equity Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.</p> <p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Iredell	<p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Zirrus – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Lincoln	<p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Mecklenburg	<p>Digital Champion Grant Camino Community Development Corporation</p>

	<p>Helping people reach upward mobility through programs promoting employment, education and entrepreneurial support, while overcoming barriers of access, language and culture.</p> <p>Caterpillar Ministries Ensuring homes in the Huntington Green community have internet access, individuals ages five and older have a working computer and accessories.</p> <p>Center for Digital Equity Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.</p> <p>City Startup Labs Inc. Supporting the planning and launch of the ReConnex (ReentryConnections) pilot, a retail digital device repair operation within Charlotte, providing reliable, dependable, affordable and hyper-local tech support to communities lacking such services.</p> <p>Lions Services Inc. Providing digital proficiency training.</p>
Rowan	<p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p> <p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant 2022-2023 <i>Spectrum – 9/18/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides grant funding to private broadband providers to support the expansion of service to areas of the state that currently lack broadband access.</p>
Stanly	<p>Digital Champion Grant Stanly County Providing personalized guidance through trained digital navigators, establish reliable hotspot connectivity for those lacking internet access, offer updated devices for circulation and develop tailored programs for English language learners, ultimately ensuring equitable access to digital resources and services for all members of the community.</p> <p>Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant <i>AT&T - 10/31/2026 construction deadline</i> <i>Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline</i> Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.</p>

	<p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Windstream – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Union	<p>Digital Champion Grant South Piedmont Community College Foundation Expanding internet access, providing digital devices and offering comprehensive digital literacy education to students with the skills needed for success in today's digital world.</p> <p>Center for Digital Equity Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.</p> <p>Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant <i>Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline</i> Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.</p> <p>Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant part 2 <i>Windstream and Charter (Spectrum) - 10/31/2026 construction deadline</i> Received funding to expand broadband service to 1,200 additional locations in Union County.</p> <p>Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant <i>Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline</i> Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.</p>
Regional	<p>Digital Champion Grant Hispanic Federation Inc. Addressing the digital divide among low-income, rural, immigrant Latinos across North Carolina by constructing a computer lab with a digital literacy instructor, providing subgrants to Latino-led and serving community-based organizations, device distribution and telehealth services in a private setting.</p> <p>N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence Supporting domestic violence survivors and victims and the agencies that serve them affordable, reliable high-speed internet and provide internet-enabled devices so they can access e-Filing, telehealth and online mental health services.</p>

[N.C. Telehealth Network Association](#)

Expanding telehealth access points utilizing selected libraries and healthcare providers by establishing private, securely connected spaces at the libraries for telehealth consultations, diagnoses and treatment activities. The project will also include device lending, distribution and technical assistance to promote telehealth adoption.

Centralina Region: Digital Access Resources

	Anson	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Lincoln	Mecklenburg	Rowan	Stanly	Union
Digital Literacy	Hampton B. Allen Library SPCC Burnsville Recreational Learning Ctr. Holla! Center NCWorks Caraway Foundation Anson Council on Aging Centralina AAA	Cabarrus Libraries (6) Cabarrus County Active Living Ctr. RCCC Centralina AAA Center for Digital Equity El Puente Hispano Camino Pathways NC	Gaston Public Libraries (9) Gaston College NCWorks Goodwill Gastonia Career Center Gaston Literacy Council Gaston Senior Ctr Centralina AAA Center for Digital Equity TechWorks Gaston Latin American Coalition	Iredell County Public Library Mooresville Public Library Mitchell CC NCWorks Mooresville and Statesville Centralina AAA Latin American Coalition	Charles Jonas Public Library Gaston College NCWorks Lincoln County Senior Center Centralina AAA Latin American Coalition	Mecklenburg County Public Libraries (20) CPCC CharlotteWorks Mecklenburg Active Living Centers Goodwill Career Center Centralina AAA Center for Digital Equity Latin American Coalition	Rowan County Public Libraries (4) RCCC Catawba College NCWorks Goodwill Career Center NW Rowan Literacy Council Rufy Holmes Senior Center Centralina AAA Latin American Coalition Pathways NC	Stanly County Public Libraries (5) SCC NCWorks Stanly County Senior Ctr. Centralina AAA	Union County Public Libraries (4) SPCC Monroe Community Active Adult Ctr. Centralina AAA Center for Digital Equity Latin American Coalition
Device Ownership & Access	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Hampton B. Allen Library Holla! Center NCWorks Atrium Health Anson County Schools	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Cabarrus Libraries Cabarrus County Schools NCWorks	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Gaston Public Schools Gaston Libraries Gaston Senior Ctr NCWorks Goodwill Gastonia Career Center	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Iredell County Public Library Mooresville Public Library NCWorks Iredell-Statesville Schools Mooresville Graded Schools	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Charles Jonas Public Library NCWorks Lincoln County Senior Services Lincoln County Schools	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools	E2D Kramden Institute Students in Training PCs for People Rowan Libraries NCWorks Goodwill Career Center NW Rufy Holmes Senior Center Rowan Salisbury Schools	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People Stanly Libraries NCWorks Stanly Senior Center Stanly County Schools	E2D Kramden Institute PCs for People SPCC Union Libraries NCWorks Union County Public Schools

Centralina Region: Digital Access Resources

	Anson	Cabarrus	Gaston	Iredell	Lincoln	Mecklenburg	Rowan	Stanly	Union
Affordability	Lifeline/ Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/ Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/Zirrus Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/ Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/ Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program	Lifeline/ Windstream Spectrum Internet Assist AT&T Access Program
Public Safety & Emergency Alerts	ACORN Alerts NC211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Anson County Emergency Alerts NC Emergency Mgt. American Red Cross	CabCoALERT NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Cabarrus County Emergency Mgt. NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	ALERT Gaston CodeRED NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Gaston County Emergency Mgt. NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	OnSolve (CodeRED) Iredell NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Iredell County Emergency Mgt. NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	Smart911 Alerts NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Lincoln County Emergency Mgt. NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	CharMeck Alerts Safe Outcomes NC 211 CharMeck 311 Ready Mecklenburg NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	RoCo Alerts Ready Rowan NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Rowan County Emergency Mgt. NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	Stanly Alerts NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Stanly Emergency Management NC Emergency Management American Red Cross	UC Alerts NC 211 NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network NOAA Union Emergency Management NC Emergency Management American Red Cross

Digital Opportunity Plan

Anson County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Anson County - Digital Opportunity Working Group

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Nick Addison, Planning Director

Powered by Centralina

The Anson County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Anson County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

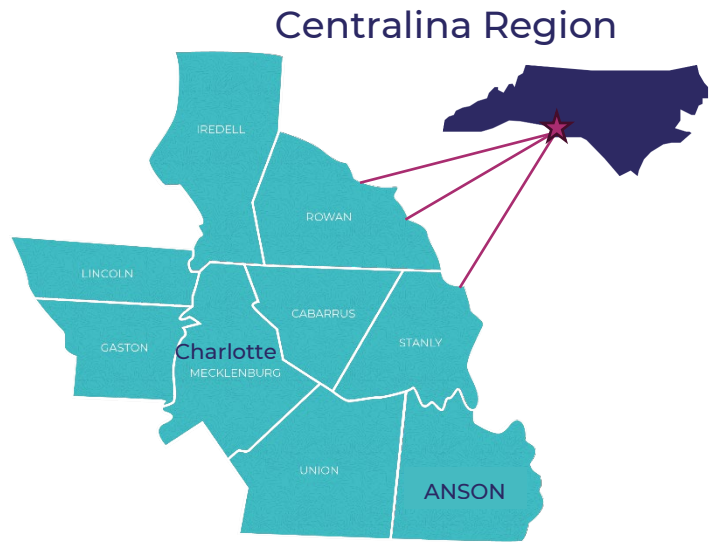
- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Anson and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at Centralina.org/digital, Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

Setting the Digital Scene

Anson County, located in the southern part of the Centralina region along the South Carolina border, is a rural community with a strong commitment to improving digital access and connectivity for its residents, businesses and institutions.

Expanding broadband, increasing digital literacy, improving device access and strengthening public safety communications are critical to Anson's long-term economic growth, educational opportunities, healthcare access and community resilience.



Recognizing the urgent need to address gaps in internet access, digital skills and technology ownership, Anson County developed this Digital Opportunity Plan to serve as a strategic guide for expanding access to digital tools and services ensuring all residents have the knowledge and resources needed to thrive in a digitally connected world.

Anson's landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. While many areas still rely on outdated DSL infrastructure, there is increasing access to fiber and fixed wireless technology. The county's investment in education and training providers such as South Piedmont Community College and NCWorks supports local workforce readiness, especially as remote job opportunities continue to grow. Libraries, nonprofits and public health centers play an active role in expanding digital tools and offering technology assistance to residents of all ages.

This plan builds upon Anson's strengths with its engaged community partners and growing digital awareness to ensure every household, school and small business can benefit from modern connectivity. With focused strategies and targeted investments, the county can foster greater participation in the digital economy, reduce gaps in service availability and create a foundation for future innovation.

Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Anson County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Anson NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

Metric	Centralina	Anson	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,503,720	22,432	Population has slightly declined since 2023
Percent with Reliable Broadband	89%	46%	A significant portion of Anson County households and businesses have the minimum requirements defined by the FCC to access internet services
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	11%	54%	Over half of residents lack access to 100/20 Mbps which is the minimum speed benchmark of the FCC and highlights the need for infrastructure upgrades
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	20%	Half of the county has access to fiber broadband, which creates a foundation to promote faster speeds and attract remote workers and businesses
Cable Broadband Available	86%	44%	Opportunity for broadband investment to meet faster speeds for residents
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	10%	50%	DSL and fixed wireless, a slower outdated infrastructure, is the only option for many residents and signals urgency to prioritize upgrades to these areas.
Broadband Subscription Rate	73%	64%	Potential for greater engagement through affordability programs and awareness campaigns
Households Without Internet Access	10%	17%	Opportunity to connect households through targeted outreach, affordability programs and public Wi-Fi expansion.
Households Without Internet Devices	8%	13%	Highlights the need for device distribution programs and initiatives to ensure residents can fully participate in online services and learning with laptops, tablets and smartphones
Households with High Digital Stress	10%	20%	Residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access

Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Strong opportunity to support digital entrepreneurship which includes small business training, but digital access is a key enabler for growth of these businesses
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Large opportunity to better align workforce to remote work industries by improving internet speeds and training Ex: NC Work from Anywhere Program by NC State Extension

Assets and Connectivity

Anson County has a strong foundation of digital resources, partnerships and grant supported initiatives (Appendix B) that enhance current connectivity and lay the groundwork for future growth.

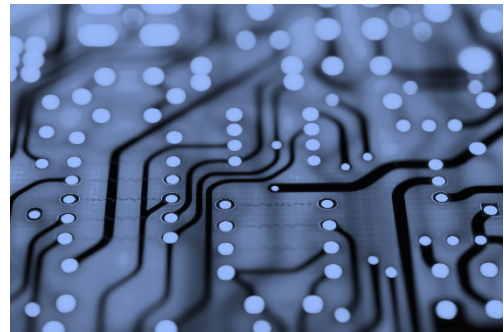
Broadband Providers: Fixed wireless, DSL and fiber services available in more populated areas.

Libraries and Public Institutions: The Hampton B. Allen Library and other community centers provide free internet access, digital literacy workshops and mobile hotspot lending.

Education and Workforce Development: South Piedmont Community College (SPCC), Anson County Schools, NCWorks Career Center and nonprofit organizations offer digital skills training and technology access programs.

Public Safety Alerts: ACORN Alerts system and NC 211 services help residents stay informed during emergencies.

Despite these assets, many residents, particularly in rural and low-income areas, face challenges with reliable internet access, affordable technology and digital literacy resources.



Key Challenges

Anson County has made progress in digital connectivity, yet several challenges remain that impact full participation in online services and economic opportunity:

- **Limited Broadband Coverage at High Speeds:** While 64% of Anson County households meet the minimum benchmark for reliable broadband, 36% remain unserved or underserved at 100/20 Mbps. Roughly half the county still depends on slower DSL or fixed wireless options, especially in rural areas where infrastructure upgrades are most needed.

- **Low Fiber and Cable Availability:** Only 20% of households have access to fiber, and just 44% have access to cable broadband. This limits options for faster, more reliable connections that support remote work, small business growth and digital learning.
- **Affordability Gaps and Subscription Rates:** Roughly one in three households in Anson County do not subscribe to broadband or lack any internet access at all. While service may be available in many areas, cost remains a major barrier for many families. Households with lower incomes are significantly less likely to have internet service, highlighting the need for expanded outreach around discount programs, device affordability and public Wi-Fi access.
- **Device Access and Digital Stress:** Thirteen percent of households lack internet-enabled devices and 20% experience high digital stress, which means they rely only on cellphones or have no digital tools at all. This limits residents' ability to engage in essential services such as telehealth, education and job applications.
- **Digital Skill Gaps Development Needs:** Older adults, job seekers and youth in rural areas often lack foundational digital skills. Despite strong training resources from partners like SPCC and NCWorks, awareness and consistent engagement remain challenges.
- **Emergency Communication Accessibility:** Many residents are still not enrolled in ACORN Alerts or do not understand how to use emergency alert tools effectively. Language access, device limitations and limited digital readiness pose risks in times of crisis.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and advance digital opportunities, Anson County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

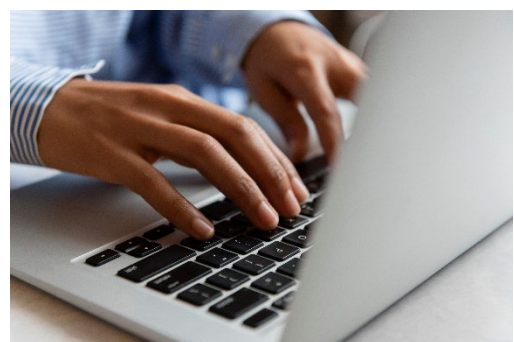
The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Hampton B. Allen Library](#) – Located in Wadesboro, offers regularly scheduled workshops to enhance digital skills. For assistance call (704) 694-5177
 - Bilingual materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive resources are available to support individuals with disabilities

- [South Piedmont Community College \(SPCC\)](#) at the Lockhart-Taylor Center—in Wadesboro, offers no cost digital literacy classes providing the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 290-5216
 - SPCC offers support services in Spanish to assist students
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
 - Horne Library at Polkton Campus is also available to assist students
- [Burnsville Recreational Learning Center](#) – Community organization in Polkton, NC, offers weekly computer-based training. For information (704) 826-8737
- [Holla! Center](#) – A non-profit organization in Morven, NC, offers a variety of services and computer training for youth. For assistance (704) 851-3144
- [NCWorks Career Center - Anson](#) – Located in Wadesboro, assists adults and dislocated workers by providing financial aid for approved training programs, including On-the-Job training and digital literacy. For assistance contact - (704) 272-5479
- [NCWorks Career Center – Anson - NextGen Services](#) offers Career readiness workshops that cover digital skills and educational training for young adults 16-24 years old. For assistance contact (704) 272-5475
- [The Caraway Foundation](#) – Promotes digital opportunities, devices and literacy by providing computer skills training for seniors and unemployed residents, enhancing access to technology and digital resources. For more information (704) 761-4351
- [Anson County Council on Aging](#) – Offers digital skills assistance and classes in Wadesboro. For information contact (704) 694-6616
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704)348-2708 Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services. [South Piedmont Community College](#) – Participants who complete the digital literacy classes receive a \$250 voucher to use toward the purchase of a digital device. Contact: (704) 290-5216



- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
- [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income. (651) 354-2552

Computer Access

- [Hampton B. Allen Library](#)- Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet, Wi-Fi access and mobile hotspots available for checkout
- [Holla! Center](#) – Provides youth and community members access to public computers with internet service
- [NCWorks Career Center-Anson](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance
- [Anson County Schools](#) – Provides students with laptops or digital devices to ensure every student has access to a personal digital device. Questions about devices (704) 694-4417

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible to Anson County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission, provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473 [Windstream](#) participates in this program. T-Mobile offers this program through its subsidiary, [Assurance Wireless](#)
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [ACORN Alerts](#) – Emergency alert program notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates via telephone, text message (SMS) and email. [Registration](#) is available on the Anson County website
 - Special Needs Registry – Residents can use [ACORN Alerts](#) to register individuals with medical or functional needs, helping emergency responders provide timely support during disasters and emergencies
- [NC 211](#) – No-cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. These connect individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Services provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts
- [Anson County Emergency Alert program](#) – Notifies residents via telephone, text messaging (SMS) and email about emergencies, hazards and severe weather. Registration is [online](#) via the Anson County website. Ongoing work to improve communication accessibility before, during and after hazardous events, especially for vulnerable populations
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs

Action Framework and RASCI Overview

The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting,

consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supporting – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supporting	Consulted	Informed
Boost local workforce readiness for remote jobs and digital economy roles (Digital Skills Development)	SPCC; NCWorks; Libraries; Nonprofits	Anson County	NCWorks; Centralina Workforce Development Board; Aging Agencies; Other Funders	Anson County Schools; Aging Agencies; Employers	Public
Enable small businesses to access online markets through better broadband (Business Growth)	Internet Providers; Anson Chamber of Commerce; Anson County EDC	Anson County	SPCC Small Business Center	SPCC Small Business Center	Public
Prepare local workers for remote and technology-driven careers (Workforce Resilience)	SPCC; NCWorks;	Anson County	Centralina Workforce Development Board; SPCC	Employers; Anson County Schools	Public
Support emergency preparedness; telehealth and education through stronger internet infrastructure (Connected Communities)	Anson County Emergency Management; Sheriff dept.; Health and Social service providers; Anson	Anson County (website, ACORN alerts, SMS messaging); Local government leadership; Energy providers	Centralina; Internet Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; County Communications; Public	Emergency Management, Fire, EMS, 211	Public

	County Schools		Libraries; Aging Programs		
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Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Anson County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the plan's four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective – Future Focus Area	Sample Outcome Metrics
Expand Digital Literacy	Boost local workforce readiness for remote jobs and digital economy roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of residents completing digital literacy classes (SPCC, NCWorks, Libraries) - Number of older adults assisted through Digital Navigation Program - Number of digital skills workshops hosted
Increase Device Ownership and Access	Enable more small businesses to access online markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of refurbished devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, SPCC) - Number of businesses or individuals accessing devices through voucher or donation programs - Number of public hot spots checked out or used
Improve Affordability of Broadband Services	Prepare local workers for remote and technology-driven careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline or other broadband affordability programs - Number of broadband affordability outreach campaigns completed - Number of new broadband subscribers in low-income areas
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of residents registered for ACORN Alerts and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety workshops or outreach sessions delivered - Number of public education materials developed - Number of physical locations identified for sharing of print materials and in-person resource connections

Priority Areas for Digital Growth

Building on existing strengths, Anson County has several opportunities to expand digital access, enhance workforce readiness and support economic growth through targeted investments and initiatives.

Key focus areas include:

- Expand high-speed broadband (100/20 Mbps and higher) coverage to reach all households and businesses
- Promote affordable broadband adoption programs to increase subscription rates
- Strengthen digital literacy initiatives for students, older adults, veterans, multilingual, low-literacy and emerging entrepreneurs
- Leverage microbusiness growth and remote work potential to build a digitally connected local economy
- Develop targeted outreach to households with lower device ownership to expand participation in education, healthcare and the economy
- Expand access to mobile repeaters and satellite communication systems and enhance system redundancy mechanisms
- Increase enrollment in the ACORN and SMS messaging public safety alert system through in-person engagement and community events
- Continue to enhance public safety alerts in the County website and social networking outlets, establish easily understandable and accessible public safety print materials to distribute and support via digital literacy and inclusion programs.

Conclusion

Anson County is well-positioned to make future progress in expanding digital access and participation. With a network of committed partners, active community programs and targeted support through BAND-NC and other digital investment efforts, the county has laid the groundwork to address internet availability, affordability, device access and digital literacy.

By aligning with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and advancing its four strategic goals, Anson County is taking clear steps to ensure all residents can connect, learn, work and thrive in a modern digital environment. Continued collaboration and investment will help the county strengthen its workforce, enhance public safety and health and drive economic growth.

This plan serves as an implementation launching pad for partners and strategies and as a potential resource bridge for local, county regional and state and federal partners to connect new technologies and community needs in innovative ways amongst trusted partners. Anson County remains committed to adapting and

advancing its digital strategy and ensuring that every household, school and business is part of the region's connected future.

Appendix A

ANSON COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.

Remaining Unfunded Unserved & Underserved Locations

Served Locations

Federal Funded Locations

State Funded Locations - GREAT & CAB

Local Award Locations

Unserved & Underserved Locations from the FCC Broadband Data Collection have been displayed on this map with funded locations overlaid. Locations that have had funds obligated through previous Federal, State or Local broadband expansion programs could be still unserved or underserved depending on the status of those projects and when the funds were obligated.

Unserved locations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs in NC are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service, through Fiber, Cable, or non-mobile Licensed Fixed Wireless technologies, of at least 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds. Underserved locations are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service of at least 100mb/s Download and 20mb/s Upload speeds, but greater than 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds.

ANSON COUNTY STATISTICS

Percent Served with Reliable Broadband*

46.39%

5,332 Total Locations

Percent Unserved & Underserved *

53.61 %

6,162 Total Locations

Locations Funded through State, Federal or Local Programs*

29.93%

3,440 Total Locations

Percent with Fiber Broadband Available *

20.21%

2,323 Total Locations

Percent with Cable Broadband Available*

44.23%

5,084 Total Locations

Percent with DSL or Fixed Wireless Only *

50.05%

5,753 Total Locations

Percent with Broadband Subscription **

64.12%

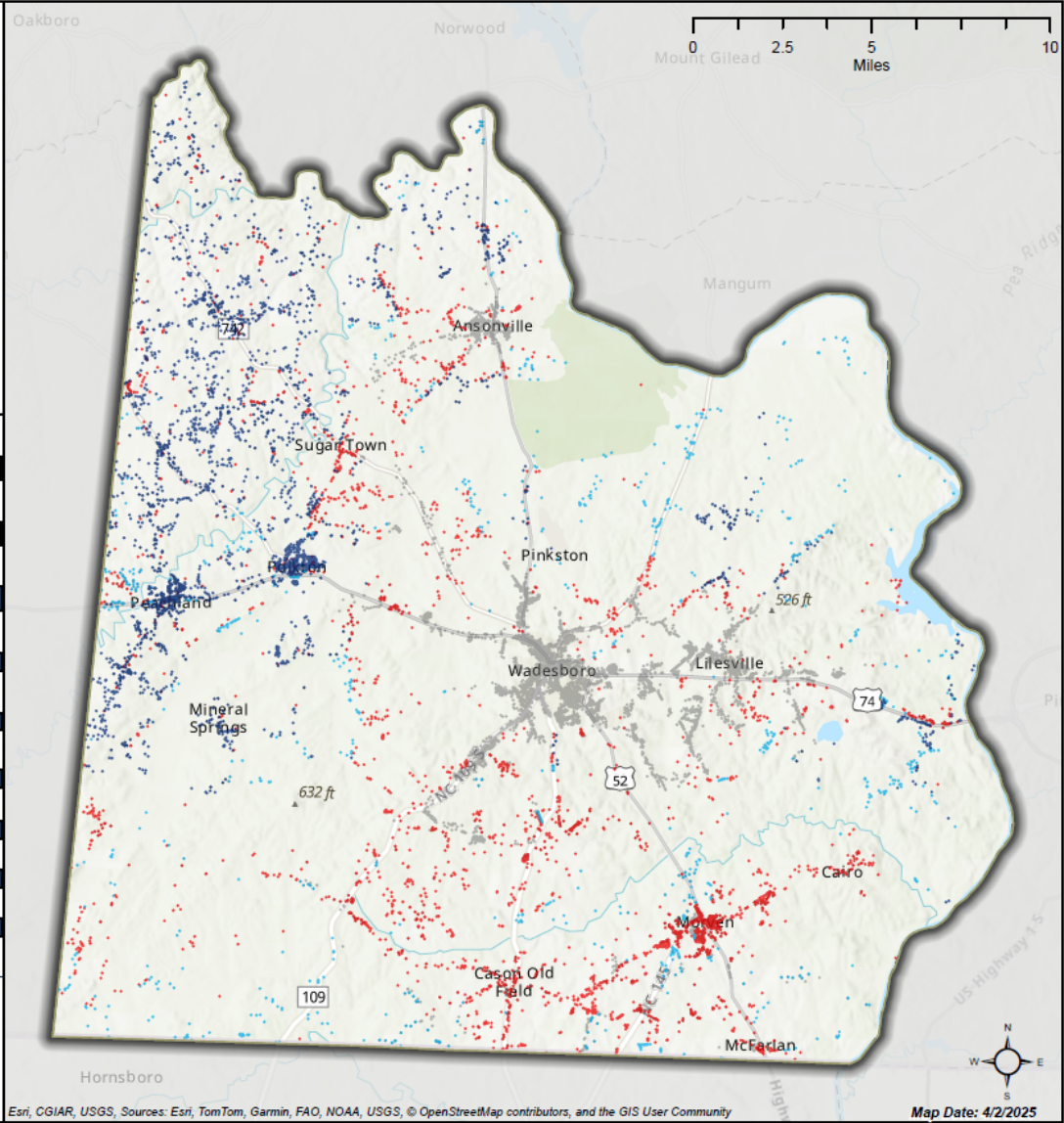
Percent with No Internet Access **

16.76%

Percent with No Internet Devices **

13.35%

DATA SOURCES:
*FCC BDC - Federal Communication Commission Broadband Data Collection Version 5 Published June 2024 (Provider Reported as of November, 2024)
Funded locations may be served, unserved, or underserved depending on when the project received funding and the requirements of the specific program.
**ACS - U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimate



Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Anson County

Digital Champion Grant

[South Piedmont Community College Foundation](#)

Expanding internet access, providing digital devices and offering comprehensive digital literacy education to students with the skills needed for success in today's digital world.

[The Caraway Foundation](#)

Addressing the critical gaps in access to technology, internet connectivity and computer literacy skills by empowering seniors, individuals from low-income and/or rural communities and other marginalized segments utilizing essential resources and comprehensive training.

[Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology \(GREAT\) Grant](#)

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

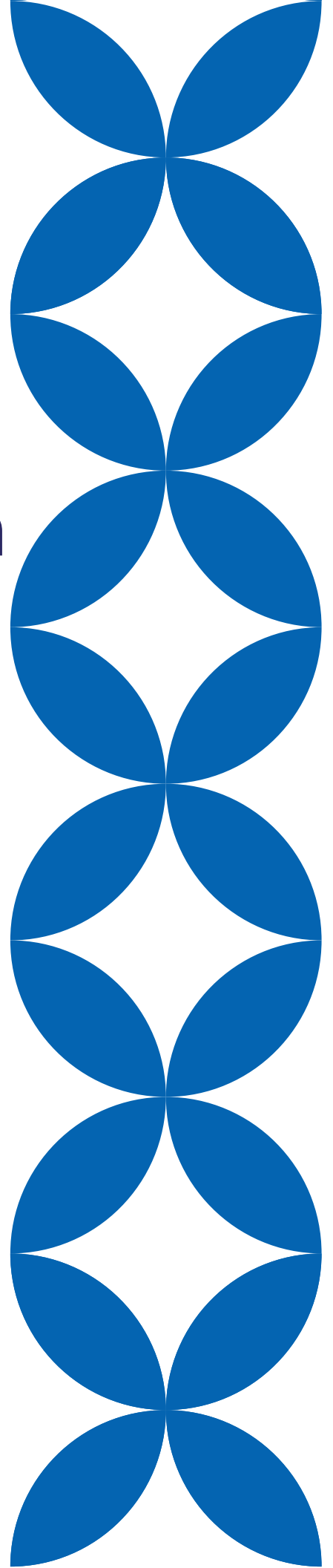
Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Cabarrus County
July 2025



CABARRUS COUNTY
America Thrives Here



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Cabarrus County – Digital Opportunity Team

Sean B. Newton, Cabarrus County Manager

Todd M. Shanley, Chief Information Technology Officer

Powered by Centralina

The Cabarrus County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

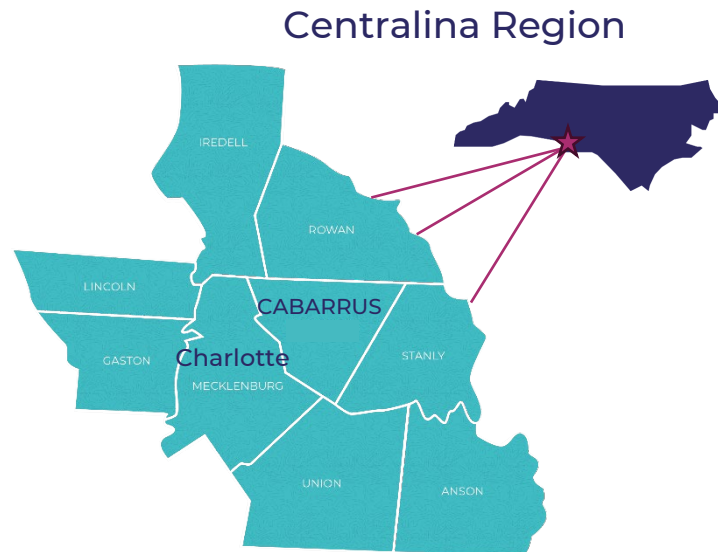
Cabarrus County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Cabarrus and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at [Centralina.org/digital](https://centralina.org/digital), Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

Setting the Digital Scene

Cabarrus County, located northeast of Charlotte in the Centralina region holds strong assets in workforce, education and healthcare. While 96% of broadband infrastructure is widely available across most of the county, there remain important opportunities to improve affordability, device access and digital readiness for residents, particularly in rural and lower-income communities.



Digital access supports Cabarrus County's goals for educational attainment, workforce competitiveness and community resilience. Local leaders recognize that targeted investments in training, broadband service, and outreach are needed to ensure that all residents and businesses benefit from modern technology.

This plan outlines Cabarrus County's strategic approach to improving digital access for all residents and businesses.

Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Cabarrus County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Cabarrus NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

Metric	Centralina	Cabarrus	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,382,365	244,925	Population growth presents opportunities to scale digital infrastructure and services.
Percent with Reliable Broadband	73%	96%	Coverage is strong, but access to faster speeds still varies by location.
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	9%	4%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	62%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	93%	Multiple providers offer competitive services
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	14%	4%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure

Broadband Subscription Rate	91%	78%	High engagement, yet affordability remains a concern
Households Without Internet Access	7%	8%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	3%	4%	Device access remains a challenge for some households
Households with High Digital Stress	7%	6%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Strong potential to support entrepreneurs with digital tools and training
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Growing	Opportunity to align training with remote job growth

Assets and Connectivity

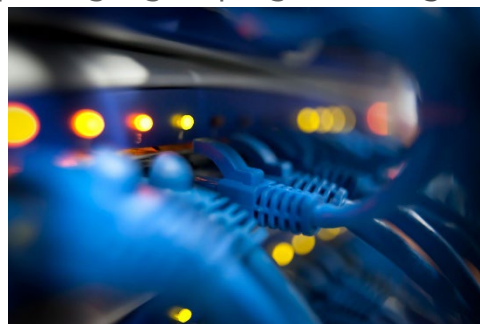
Cabarrus County has a strong base of partners supporting digital progress of digital resources, partnerships and grant supported initiatives that enhance current connectivity and continue the groundwork for future growth.

Libraries: Six library branches provide public Wi-Fi, computer access and digital training.

Digital Training Programs: Cabarrus County Active Living Centers, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) and nonprofits like El Puente Hispano provide Northstar Digital Literacy and bilingual instruction.

Public Safety Alerts: The CabCoALERT system helps residents stay informed of emergencies.

Digital Grants: Windstream (CAB Grant) and Spectrum (GREAT Grant) support broadband expansion in targeted project areas. (See Appendix B for a list)



Key Challenges

- Small areas of the county remain unserved or underserved, particularly in rapidly growing suburban fringes and rural zones.
- Despite broad coverage, a segment of residents cannot afford monthly broadband service or suitable devices.
- Device ownership gaps are more concentrated among low-income households, older adults and individuals with limited English proficiency.

- Digital skill levels vary widely across the county, creating barriers for job seekers and small business owners.
- Residents who are not connected may lack awareness of affordability programs or local resources.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Cabarrus County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Cabarrus County Public Library](#) - Offers Northstar Digital Literacy online learning platform to enhance digital skills. For assistance call (704) 920-2050
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Six locations throughout the county can provide assistance:
 - Concord – Main Branch and Afton Ridge Branch
 - Harrisburg Branch
 - Kannapolis Branch
 - Midland Branch
 - Mount Pleasant Branch
- [Cabarrus County Active Living Centers](#) – Offer computer skill classes utilizing the Northstar Digital Literacy curriculum to assist the aging population with internet skills and online safety. For more information call (704) 920-3484
- [Rowan-Cabarrus Community College \(RCCC\)](#) Offers Northstar Digital Literacy online learning for students to improve their digital skills and provide the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 290-5216
 - RCCC offers support services in Spanish to assist students.
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704) 348-2708

Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region

- [Center for Digital Equity \(CDE\)](#) – Cabarrus County has partnered with CDE to improve the digital infrastructure and bridge the digital divide Contact CDE via an [online form](#)
- [El Puente Hispano](#) – This organization based in Cabarrus County provides resources and support to the Hispanic community which includes education programs and digital skills. For information (980) 255-1434
- [Camino](#) – A bilingual nonprofit organization based in northeast Charlotte offers basic computer skills and internet safety training to Latino families. For more information contact (704) 596-5606
- [Pathways NC, Inc.](#) – This community-focused organization provides accessible computer education and digital literacy programs, with an emphasis on serving senior citizens Contact: info@pathwaysnc.com

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - is a nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
- [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income

Computer Access

- [Cabarrus County Public Libraries](#) - Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access.
 - Concord Main Branch and Afton Ridge Branch
 - Harrisburg Branch Library
 - Kannapolis Branch Library
 - Midland Branch Library
 - Mt. Pleasant Branch Library
- [Cabarrus County Schools](#) – Provides a 1:1 Chromebook program for students. Questions about devices call (704) 260-5866

- [NCWorks Career Center-Cabarrus](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible to Cabarrus County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission, provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473
- [Windstream](#) participates in this program
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [CabCoALERT](#)– Emergency alert notification system to cell phone or email for anyone interested in safety or welfare in Cabarrus County including severe weather, hazardous road conditions, or other emergency situations
- [Registration](#) is on the County's website
- Special Needs Registry – Residents can use [CabCoALERT](#) to register individuals with medical or functional needs, helping emergency responders provide timely support during disasters and emergencies
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Services provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts
- [Cabarrus County Emergency Management](#) – Ongoing work to improve communication accessibility before, during and after hazardous events, especially for vulnerable populations
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts

- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs

Action Framework and RASCI Overview

The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting, consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supporting – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Build digital skills for employment and education (Digital Skills Development)	RCCC; Cabarrus Libraries; NCWorks; Cabarrus County Schools	Cabarrus County	RCCC; El Puente Hispano; NCWorks; Centralina Workforce Development Board; Aging Agencies	Cabarrus County Schools; Centralina Area Agency on Aging; Employers	Public
Expand access to refurbished or discounted devices (Increase Access)	E2D; RCCC; Kramden Institute Nonprofits	Cabarrus County	Camino; Cabarrus County Schools	Nonprofits	Public
Increase broadband affordability outreach (Improve Affordability)	Libraries; NCWorks; RCCC	Cabarrus County	Center for Digital Equity; Libraries	Internet Service Providers	Public
Strengthen public education outreach and	Cabarrus Emergency Management Fire,	Cabarrus County (website, CabCo	Centralina, Internet Service Providers;	Emergency Management, Fire, EMS, 211	Public

enrollment in emergency alerts (Connected Communities)	Sheriff dept, Police, Public Information Office; Health and social service Providers; Cabarrus County Schools	ALERT, SMS messaging); Local government leadership; Energy providers	National Weather Service; Red Cross; County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs		
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Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Cabarrus County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the plan's four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
Improve Digital Skills	Increase workforce readiness and digital fluency	-Number of digital workshops and residents trained (RCCC, NCWorks, Libraries) -Number of jobseekers accessing digital tools (NCWorks) Engagement with seniors (Centralina Area Council on Aging)
Expand Access to Devices	Grow access to digital tools for households and small businesses	-Number of devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, CCS) -Public Wi-Fi usage (ISPs) -Tech access points (Libraries, NCWorks, CCS)
Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	-Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	- Number of residents registered for CabCoALERT and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety workshops or outreach sessions delivered

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Cabarrus County

To build on Cabarrus County's digital progress, the following priority areas highlight where focused action can help expand access, strengthen skills and support economic growth across the community:

- Target final 4% of unserved or underserved locations with infrastructure expansion
- Promote Lifeline and similar programs to connect remaining 4% without home internet
- Close remaining device access gaps with expanded distribution and library lending programs
- Offer bilingual and adaptive learning opportunities for residents with skill barriers
- Continue to grow the region's remote work readiness by connecting digital literacy to local job pipelines

Conclusion

Cabarrus County is well positioned to extend digital access and economic opportunity to every household and business. With a strong foundation in infrastructure, committed community partners and targeted programs, the county can address final gaps and expand digital participation.

By working in alignment with Centralina and its regional digital opportunity strategy, Cabarrus County is creating a more connected future. These steps will improve workforce development, community safety and long-term resilience for residents across the county.



CABARRUS COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.

●

Remaining Unfunded Unserved & Underserved Locations

●

Served Locations

●

Federal Funded Locations

●

State Funded Locations - GREAT & CAB

●

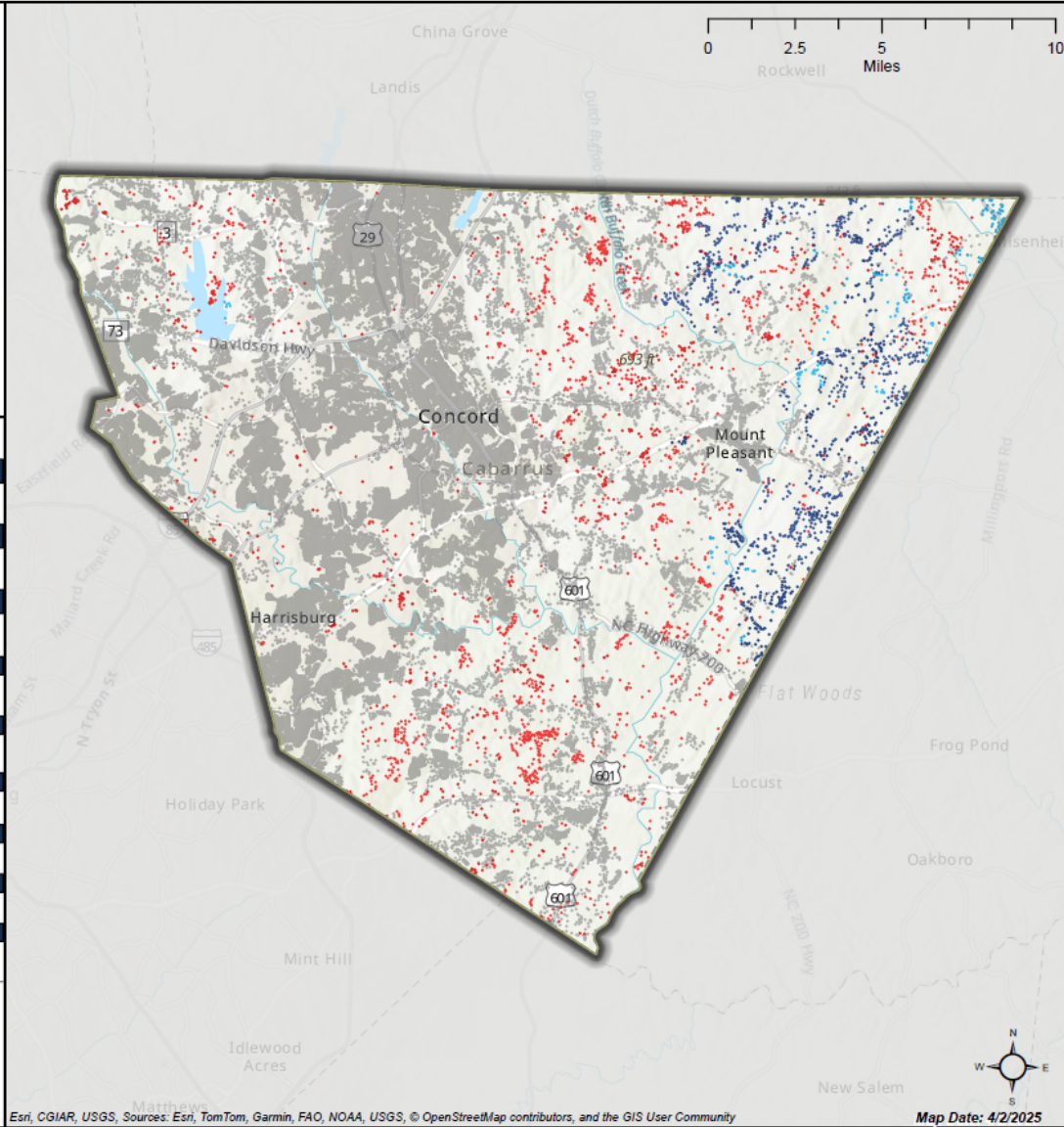
Local Award Locations

Unserved & Underserved Locations from the FCC Broadband Data Collection have been displayed on this map with funded locations overlaid. Locations that have had funds obligated through previous Federal, State or Local broadband expansion programs could be still unserved or underserved depending on the status of those projects and when the funds were obligated.

Unserved locations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs in NC are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service, through Fiber, Cable, or non-mobile Licensed Fixed Wireless technologies, of at least 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds. Underserved locations are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service of at least 100mb/s Download and 20mb/s Upload speeds, but greater than 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds.

CABARRUS COUNTY STATISTICS	
Percent Served with Reliable Broadband*	
96.24%	80,850 Total Locations
Percent Unserved & Underserved *	
3.76 %	3,157 Total Locations
Locations Funded through State, Federal or Local Programs*	
1.52%	1,281 Total Locations
Percent with Fiber Broadband Available *	
61.73%	51,860 Total Locations
Percent with Cable Broadband Available*	
93.36%	78,433 Total Locations
Percent with DSL or Fixed Wireless Only *	
3.57%	2,995 Total Locations
Percent with Broadband Subscription **	
77.72%	
Percent with No Internet Access **	
8.04%	
Percent with No Internet Devices **	
4.8%	

DATA SOURCES:
*FCC BDC - Federal Communication Commission Broadband Data Collection Version 5 Published June 2024 (Provider Reported as of November, 2024)
Funded locations may be served, unserved, or underserved depending on when the project received funding and the requirements of the specific program.
**ACS - U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Cabarrus County

Digital Champion Grant

Center for Digital Equity

Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.

Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant

Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline

Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.

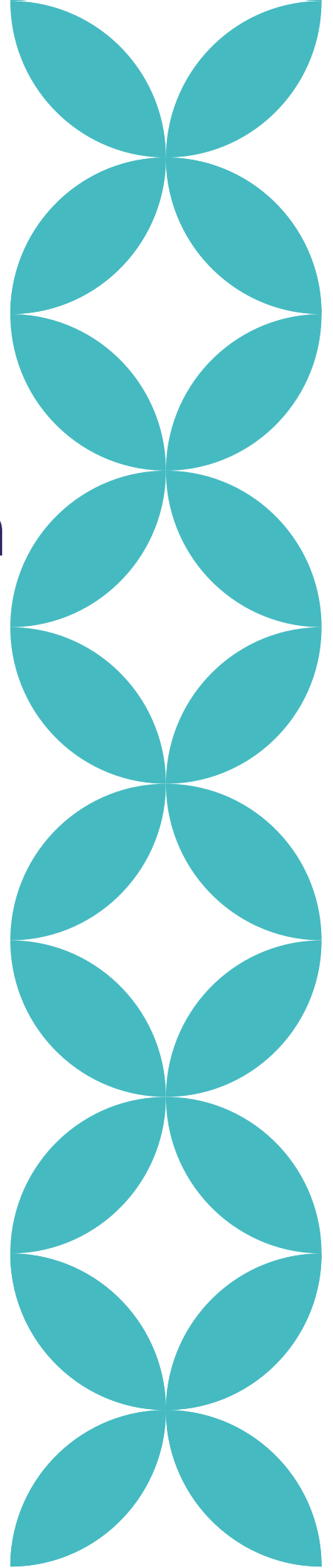
Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Gaston County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Gaston County – Digital Opportunity Working Group

Matthew Rhoten, Gaston County Manager

Justin Amos, Executive Director of Intergovernmental Relations

Ricky Johnson, Information Technology Director

Powered by Centralina

The Gaston County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Gaston County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

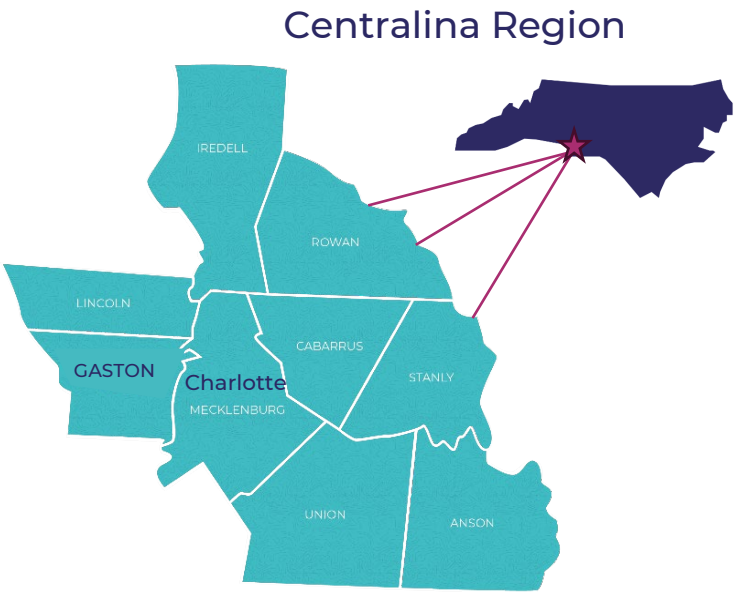
- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Gaston and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at [Centralina.org/digital](https://centralina.org/digital), Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

Setting the Digital Scene

Located west of the Charlotte metro area, Gaston County is a rapidly growing community that blends urban centers with rural towns. The county's digital strengths include high fiber availability and strong broadband subscription rates. With growth in remote work and entrepreneurial activity, digital access remains vital to economic mobility. While most areas are well served, certain neighborhoods still face slower infrastructure and limited device ownership.

This plan outlines Gaston County's key strategies to improve access and participation for all residents and businesses.



Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Gaston County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Gaston NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

Metric	Centralina	Gaston	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,382,365	242,010	Growing population indicates continued need for digital services
Percent with Reliable Broadband	73%	98%	Strong broadband coverage across most locations
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	9%	2%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	42%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	96%	Multiple providers offer competitive services
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	14%	2%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure
Broadband Subscription Rate	91%	70%	High engagement, yet affordability remains a concern
Households Without Internet Access	7%	13%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	3%	9%	Device access remains a challenge for some households

Households with High Digital Stress	7%	11%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Support digital growth for small businesses and entrepreneurs
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Expand remote job training and access to match occupation potential

Assets and Connectivity

Gaston County is supported by a well-established digital infrastructure, a network of community institutions and grant supported initiatives (Appendix B) that contribute to digital access and participation. The following assets provide a foundation for digital growth and outreach.



Fiber Broadband: Available to over 96% of locations, providing strong infrastructure for high-speed internet and remote work.

Libraries: Offer free Wi-Fi, public computers and digital literacy programs countywide.

Gaston College and NCWorks: Provide digital skills training and internet access for students and jobseekers.

Community Centers: Support device access and training through local nonprofits and faith-based groups.

Emergency Alerts: Public safety systems are in place to deliver digital alerts and emergency information to residents.

Key Challenges

- While fiber is widely available, nearly 42% of locations are still considered unserved or underserved at FCC-defined minimum speeds.
- Some residents rely on slower DSL and fixed wireless technologies, highlighting infrastructure upgrade needs.
- Although broadband subscription is high, affordability and device ownership still need outreach in low-income neighborhoods.
- Remote work readiness lags behind potential, indicating a need for targeted digital skills training and access to home-based tools.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Gaston County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

There are several organizations already helping Gaston County citizens improve and enhance their digital knowledge and literacy skills. Organizations to partner with include:

- [Gaston County Public Library](#)-Offers digital training through Northstar Digital Literacy program and workshops to provide basic understanding of digital skills. For assistance call (704) 868-2164 ext. 1
 - Bilingual staff and materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Mauney Memorial Library offers one-on-one computer assistance
 - Nine locations throughout the county: Belmont, Bessemer City, Cherryville, Dallas, Ferguson, Lowell, Mauney Memorial, Mount Holly, Stanley, Union Road Branch
- [Gaston College](#) – Offers Northstar Digital Literacy online learning for students to improve their digital skills and provide the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 825-3737
 - Gaston College offers support services in Spanish to assist students.
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [NCWorks Career Center - Gaston](#) – Located in Gastonia, assists adults and dislocated workers by providing financial aid for approved training programs, including On-the-Job training and digital literacy. For assistance contact - (704) 853-5328
- [NCWorks Career Center – Gaston - NextGen Services](#) - Offers Career readiness workshops that cover digital skills and educational training for young adults 16-24 years old. For assistance contact (704) 853-5328
- [Goodwill Gastonia Career Center](#) – Offers access to job readiness training including digital skills and job search assistance. For assistance contact (704) 916-1610

- [Gaston Literacy Council](#) - Provides digital literacy and computer skills training as part of their services. Call the Literacy Council for more information at (704) 868-4815
 - The Literacy Council offers support for Spanish-speaking individuals
- [Gaston County Senior Center](#) – Offers digital skills assistance and classes in Dallas. For information contact (704) 922-2170
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704) 348-2708
 - Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region
- [Center for Digital Equity \(CDE\)](#) – Gaston County has partnered with CDE to improve the digital infrastructure and bridge the digital divide Contact CDE via an [online form](#)
- [TechWorks Gaston](#) – Offers training and lifelong learning classes for individuals to develop new digital skills. For program information call (704) 709-3543
- [Latin American Coalition](#) – Based in Charlotte and serves Gaston County and offers digital literacy initiatives to the Latino community. For information call 704-531-3848

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
- [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income.

Computer Access

- [Gaston County Public Schools](#)- Provides 1:1 laptop to all students. Questions about devices (704) 866-6225

- [Gaston County Public Library](#)- Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access at all ten branches including:
 - Gaston County Main Branch, Ferguson and Union Road Branches
 - Belmont Branch Library
 - Bessemer City Branch Library
 - Dallas Branch Library
 - Lowell Branch Library
 - Mt. Holly Branch Library
 - Stanley Branch Library
- [Gaston County Senior Center](#) – Offers public computers and wi-fi access
- [NCWorks Career Center-Gaston](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance
- [Goodwill Gastonia Career Center](#) – Offers public access to computers with internet service to assist jobseekers.

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible to Gaston County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission, provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [Gaston County Alert Center](#) – Residents can sign up for critical updates and emergency alerts through [ALERT GASTON](#). Notices about closures and maintenance are posted on the Gaston County website. Subscribe via home, mobile or business phone, email or text message to receive urgent information
- Special Needs Registry – Residents can use [ALERT GASTON](#) to register individuals with medical or functional needs, helping emergency responders provide timely support during disasters and emergencies
- [CodeRED](#) – The City of Gastonia offers an emergency notification system that delivers urgent messages via phone calls, texts and emails. These notifications provide time-sensitive information, including severe weather, power outages,

missing persons and other critical situations. [Registration is online](#) or questions call the hotline at (866) 939-0911

- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations.
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Services provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts.
- [Gaston County Emergency Management](#) – Ongoing work to improve communication accessibility before, during and after hazardous events, especially for vulnerable populations.
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts.
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs.

Action Framework and RASCI Overview

The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting, consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supported – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Boost local workforce readiness for remote jobs and digital economy roles	Gaston College, Public Libraries, NCWorks Nonprofits	Gaston County	NCWorks, Centralina Workforce Development Board	Gaston County Schools, Aging Agencies, Employers	Public

(Digital Skills Development)			Aging Agencies, Other Funders		
Enable small businesses to access online markets through better broadband (Business Growth)	Internet Service Providers, Gaston College Small Business Center Gaston Business Association	Gaston County	Gaston EDC	Gaston College; Small Business Center	Public
Prepare local workers for remote and technology-driven careers (Workforce Resilience)	Gaston College, NCWorks	Gaston County	Centralina Workforce Development Board, Gaston College	Employers; Gaston County Schools	Public
Support emergency preparedness; telehealth and education through stronger internet infrastructure (Connected Communities)	Gaston County Emergency Management; Sheriff dept; Health and Social service providers; Gaston County Schools	Gaston County (website ALERT Gaston, SMS messaging); local government leadership; Energy Providers	Centralina; Internet Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs	Emergency Management; Fire; EMS; 211	Public

Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Gaston County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
Improve Digital Skills	Increase workforce readiness and digital fluency	-Number of digital workshops and residents trained (Gaston College, NCWorks, Public Libraries) -Number of jobseekers accessing digital tools (NCWorks) -Engagement with seniors (Centralina Area Council on Aging)
Expand Access to Devices	Grow access to digital tools for households and small businesses	-Number of devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, Gaston Schools) -Public Wi-Fi usage (ISPs) -Tech access points (Libraries, NCWorks, Gaston Schools)
Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	-Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	- Number of residents registered for ALERT Gaston and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Gaston County

To build on Gaston County's digital progress, the following priority areas highlight where focused action can help expand access, strengthen skills and support economic growth across the community:

- Extend broadband to underserved neighborhoods
- Expand device distribution through nonprofit partnerships
- Increase training focused on remote work and online business
- Grow awareness of public safety tech and alerts
- Promote digital entrepreneurship with microbusiness support

Conclusion

Gaston County is positioned to lead in digital advancement across the region. With robust fiber infrastructure, committed community partners and growing interest in remote work and entrepreneurship, the county has the momentum needed to expand digital opportunity for all. By aligning local actions with Centralina's regional goals and focusing on high-impact strategies, Gaston can ensure that every resident, business and institution is equipped to thrive in today's connected world. Continued collaboration, innovation and investment will be key to unlocking the county's full digital potential and securing long-term economic success.



GASTON COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.

● Remaining Unfunded Unserved & Underserved Locations

● Served Locations

● Federal Funded Locations

● State Funded Locations - GREAT & CAB

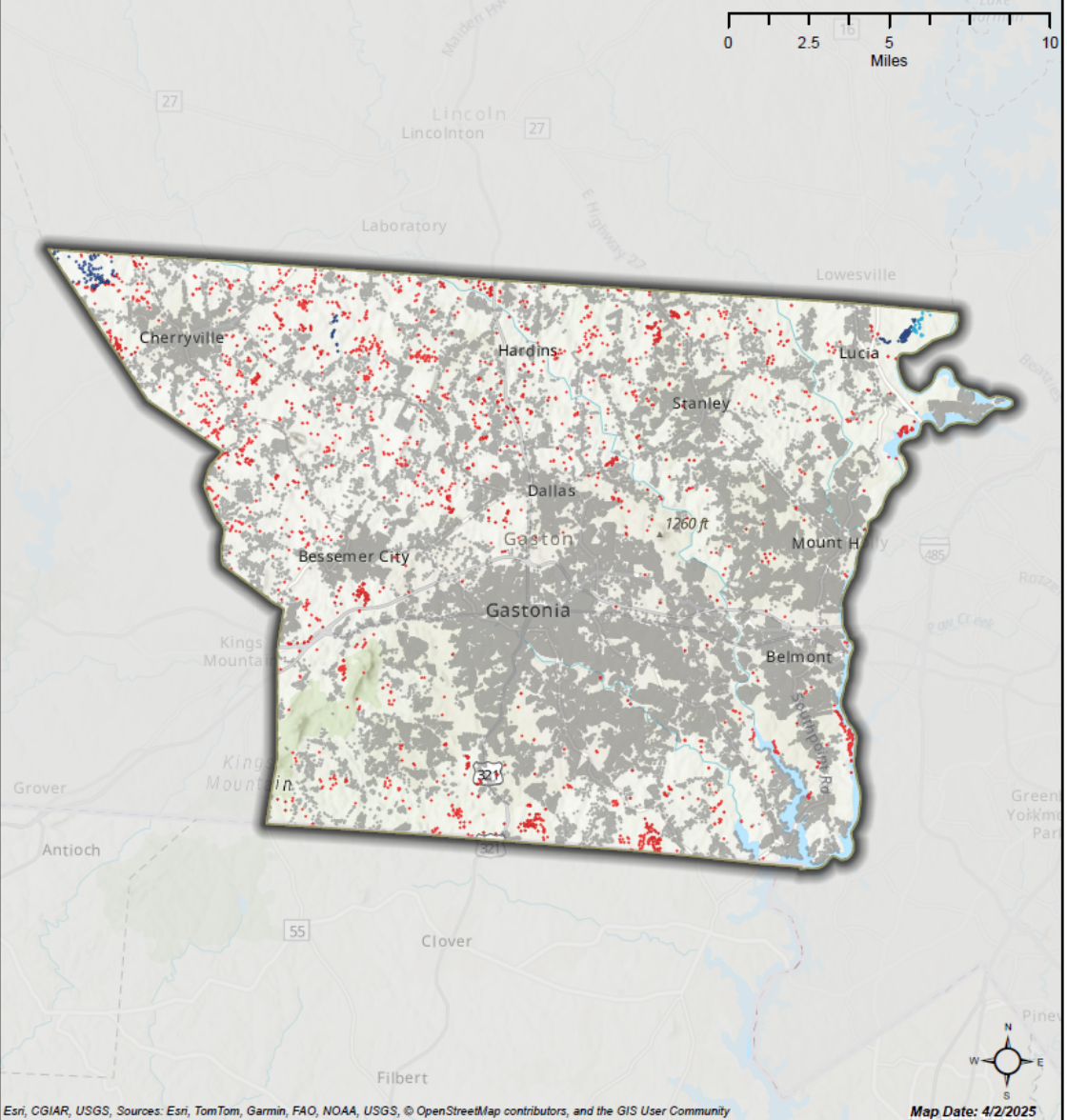
● Local Award Locations

Unserved & Underserved Locations from the FCC Broadband Data Collection have been displayed on this map with funded locations overlaid. Locations that have had funds obligated through previous Federal, State or Local broadband expansion programs could be still unserved or underserved depending on the status of those projects and when the funds were obligated.

Unserved locations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs in NC are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service, through Fiber, Cable, or non-mobile Licensed Fixed Wireless technologies, of at least 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds. Underserved locations are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service of at least 100mb/s Download and 20mb/s Upload speeds, but greater than 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds.

GASTON COUNTY STATISTICS	
Percent Served with Reliable Broadband*	
97.83%	90,314 Total Locations
Percent Unserved & Underserved *	
2.17 %	2,002 Total Locations
Locations Funded through State, Federal or Local Programs*	
0.2%	184 Total Locations
Percent with Fiber Broadband Available *	
42.33%	39,076 Total Locations
Percent with Cable Broadband Available*	
96.22%	88,828 Total Locations
Percent with DSL or Fixed Wireless Only *	
1.91%	1,760 Total Locations
Percent with Broadband Subscription **	
70.08%	
Percent with No Internet Access **	
13.41%	
Percent with No Internet Devices **	
8.89%	

DATA SOURCES:
*FCC BDC - Federal Communication Commission Broadband Data Collection Version 5 Published June 2024 (Provider Reported as of November, 2024)
Funded locations may be served, unserved, or underserved depending on when the project received funding and the requirements of the specific program.
**ACS - U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Map Date: 4/2/2025

Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Gaston County

Digital Champion Grant

TechWorks Gaston

Expanding digital literacy services and reaching into rural and isolated communities with high concentrations of individuals lacking reliable broadband and resources to attain digital literacy and tech skills.

Center for Digital Equity

Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.

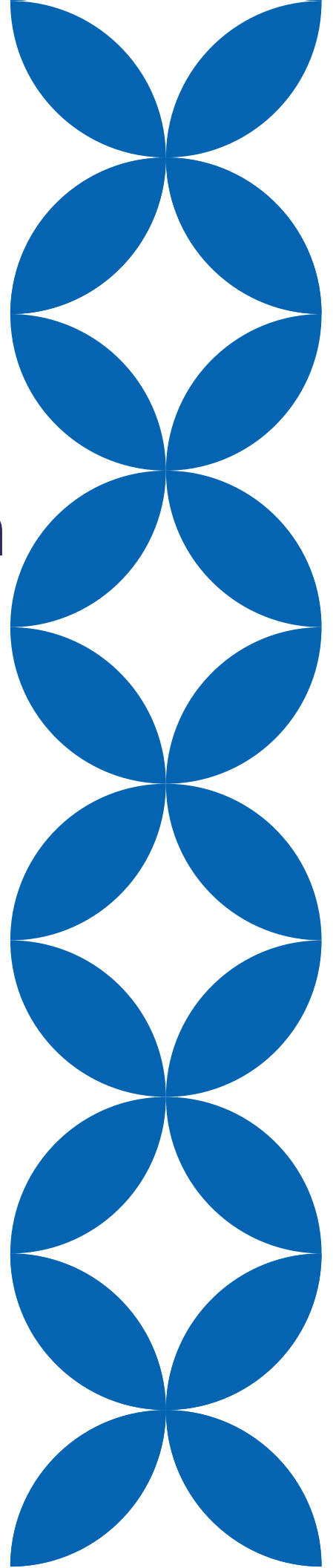
Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Iredell County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Iredell County – Digital Opportunity Team

Beth Milton, Iredell County Manager

Joey Holshouser, Chief Information Officer

Colby Moore, Chief Information Security Officer

Powered by Centralina

The Iredell County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Iredell County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Iredell and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at Centralina.org/digital, Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

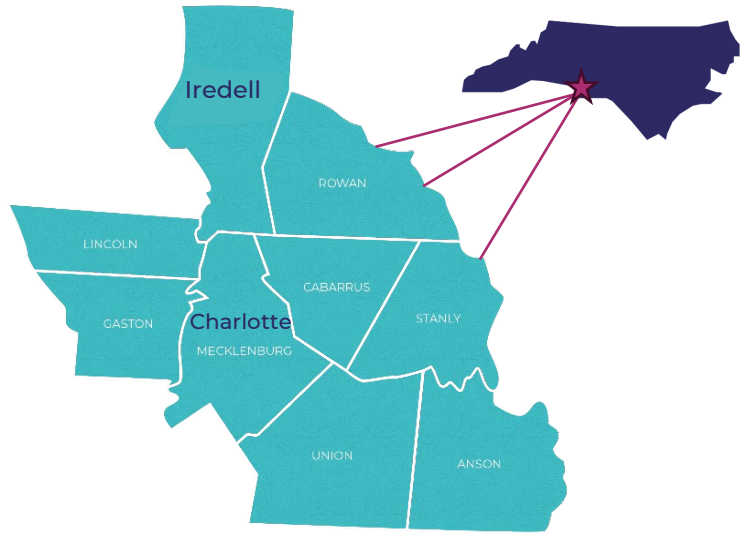
Setting the Digital Scene

Located north of the Charlotte metro area, Iredell County is a mix of rural communities and urban centers, including Statesville and Mooresville, experiencing steady growth in population and business activity. Local leaders recognize that digital access is key to strengthening educational outcomes, workforce pathways, healthcare delivery and public service engagement.

While fiber broadband covers a large portion of the county, gaps remain in several areas that still rely on DSL or have no service. Addressing these gaps and aligning local resources to support remote work, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning is the focus of this effort.

This plan outlines Iredell County's key strategies to improve access and participation for all residents and businesses.

Centralina Region



Key Highlights

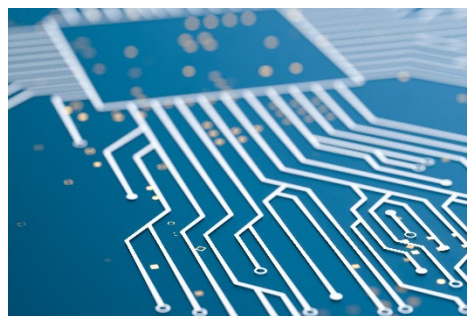
The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Iredell County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Iredell NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

Metric	Centralina	Iredell	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,382,365	206,361	Growing population indicates continued need for digital services
Percent with Reliable Broadband	73%	96%	Strong broadband coverage across most locations
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	9%	4%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	48%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	88%	Multiple providers offer competitive services
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	14%	3%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure

Broadband Subscription Rate	91%	76%	High engagement, yet affordability remains a concern
Households Without Internet Access	7%	8%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	3%	7%	Device access remains a challenge for some households
Households with High Digital Stress	7%	9%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density(Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Support digital growth for small businesses and entrepreneurs
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Expand remote job training and access to match occupation potential

Assets and Connectivity

Iredell County benefits from a network of community resources and providers that support digital education along with grant supported initiatives (Appendix B) that strengthen current connectivity and lay the foundation for future expansion.



- **Broadband Providers:** A range of internet providers offer fiber, cable and fixed wireless services. While 88 percent of households have access to fiber, some rural pockets still depend on slower connections.
- **Libraries:** The Iredell County Public Library and branches in Mooresville and Harmony offer free internet access, public computers, digital literacy classes and hotspot lending programs.
- **Education and Workforce:** Mitchell Community College and NCWorks Career Centers deliver computer training, career readiness programs and job search support using digital tools.
- **Community Centers:** Local nonprofits and civic organizations provide internet access and digital skill development for youth and older adults.
- **Public Safety and Alerts:** Emergency services offer digital alert registration to improve communication during crises. Outreach to increase enrollment is ongoing.

These assets create a solid infrastructure to expand digital learning and participation. However, gaps in access and digital fluency remain for residents in remote or lower-income areas.

Key Challenges

- Small areas of the county remain unserved or underserved, particularly in rapidly growing suburban fringes and rural zones.
- Despite broad coverage, a segment of residents cannot afford monthly broadband service or suitable devices.
- Device ownership gaps are more concentrated among low-income households, older adults and individuals with limited English proficiency.
- Digital skill levels vary widely across the county, creating barriers for job seekers and small business owners.
- Residents who are not connected may lack awareness of affordability programs or local resources.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Iredell County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Iredell County Public Library](#): A Digital Navigator is available to assist community members in accessing affordable home internet, obtaining devices and developing foundational digital skills. For assistance call 704-878-3090.
 - Bilingual staff and materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Three locations throughout the county: Statesville, Harmony, Troutman
- [Mooresville Public Library](#): Provides free self-directed tutorials to increase digital literacy and learn basic computer skills. For assistance call 704- 664-2927

- Bilingual staff and materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals.
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities.
- [Mitchell Community College Statesville & Mooresville \(MCC\)](#): Offers digital literacy classes through its Continuing Education programs, designed to improve computer skills and digital proficiency for students and community members. For assistance call 704-878-3220.
 - MCC offers support services in Spanish to assist students.
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [NCWorks Career Center - Statesville](#): Assists adults and dislocated workers by providing financial aid for approved training programs, including On-the-Job training and digital literacy. For assistance contact - (704) 878-4241
- [NCWorks Career Center – Statesville - NextGen Services](#) offers Career readiness workshops that cover digital skills and educational training for young adults 16-24 years old. For assistance contact (704) 878-4241.
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#): Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator at 704-348-2708 Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region.
- [Latin American Coalition](#): Based in Charlotte and serves the greater region by offering digital literacy initiatives to the Latino community. For information call 704-531-3848.

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide): A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact E2D at 704-657-0408.
- [Kramden Institute](#): A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact 919-293-1133.
- [PCs for People](#): A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a

government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income.

Computer Access

- [Iredell County Public Library](#): Offers Chromebooks and Wi-Fi access for checkout to patrons. Including branches in Harmony and Troutman.
- [Mooresville Public Library](#): Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access.
- [NCWorks Career Centers in Statesville and Mooresville](#): Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance.
- [Iredell-Statesville School \(I-SS\)](#): Provides 1:1 iPads or laptop to students grades 1-12. For questions about devices, call 704-872-8931.
- [Mooresville Graded School District \(MGSD\)](#): The Digital Conversion initiative equips every student in grades 4-12 with a laptop. For more information call 704-658-2518.

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible to Iredell County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission, provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center at 800-234-9473. [Zirrus](#), the local internet service provider participates in this program.
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan to qualifying households. Reach Spectrum Customer Service at 888-369-2408.
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. Reach AT&T Customer Service at 855-220-5211.

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [OnSolve \(CodeRED\)](#): this Emergency alert program notifies residents via telephone, text messaging (SMS), email and social media to inform the community about emergencies and important community updates, including missing persons or toxic chemical warnings. [Registration](#) is available on the Iredell County website.
- [Special Needs Registry Sign-Up](#): A voluntary program that helps emergency responders identify and assist residents with medical needs during disasters or emergencies.

- [NC 211](#): No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162.
- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#): A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations.
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The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting, consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supporting – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Expand digital skills training for students and workers (Digital Skills Development)	Mitchell CC; Public Libraries; NCWorks; Iredell and Mooresville	Iredell County	Mitchell CC; NCWorks; Centralina Workforce Development Board;	Iredell and Mooresville School Systems, Centralina Area Agency on	Public

	School Systems		Aging Agencies	Aging; Employers	
Support entrepreneurs and small businesses through broadband and digital tools (Business Growth)	Internet Service Providers; Chambers of Commerce	Iredell County	Mitchell CC Small Business Center; Iredell County Economic Development Corporation	Mitchell CC Small Business Center	Public
Prepare residents for remote work and tech-enabled careers (Workforce Resilience)	NC Works, Mitchell CC, Iredell Ready	Iredell County	Centralina Workforce Development Board, Mitchell CC	Employers; Iredell and Mooresville School Systems	Public
Strengthen public education outreach and enrollment in emergency alerts (Connected Communities)	Iredell Emergency Management, Fire, Sheriff dept, Police, Public Information Office; Health Providers, Iredell and Mooresville School Systems	Iredell County (website, OnSolve (CodeRED), SMS Messaging); Iredell County Hazard Mitigation Task Force; Local government leadership; Energy providers	Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; Cabarrus County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs	Emergency Management, Fire, EMS, 211	Public

Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Iredell County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
Improve Digital Skills	Increase workforce readiness and digital fluency	-Number of digital workshops and residents trained (Mitchell CC, NCWorks, Libraries) -Number of jobseekers accessing digital tools (NCWorks) -Engagement with seniors (Centralina Area Council on Aging)
Expand Access to Devices	Grow access to digital tools for households and small businesses	-Number of devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, Public Schools) -Public Wi-Fi usage (ISPs) -Tech access points (Libraries, NCWorks, Public Schools)
Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	-Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	- Number of residents registered for OnSolve (CodeRED) and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety workshops or outreach sessions delivered

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Iredell County

Iredell County can drive meaningful progress in digital opportunities through the following priorities:

- Close infrastructure gaps in unserved areas with broadband investments
- Extend device distribution through schools, libraries and nonprofits
- Provide training aligned with remote jobs and small business growth
- Promote affordable internet programs to low-income residents
- Increase digital alert enrollment and emergency readiness

Conclusion

Iredell County has a strong foundation for expanding digital participation. High fiber availability and active training networks offer a solid base. By building local strengths and addressing access and affordability gaps, the county can unlock new opportunities in education, public safety and economic development.

Through coordinated action and continued support from regional partners, Iredell is taking firm steps to ensure every resident has the tools and connection to succeed in today's digital world.



IREDELL COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.

Remaining Unfunded Unserved & Underserved Locations

Served Locations

Federal Funded Locations

State Funded Locations - GREAT & CAB

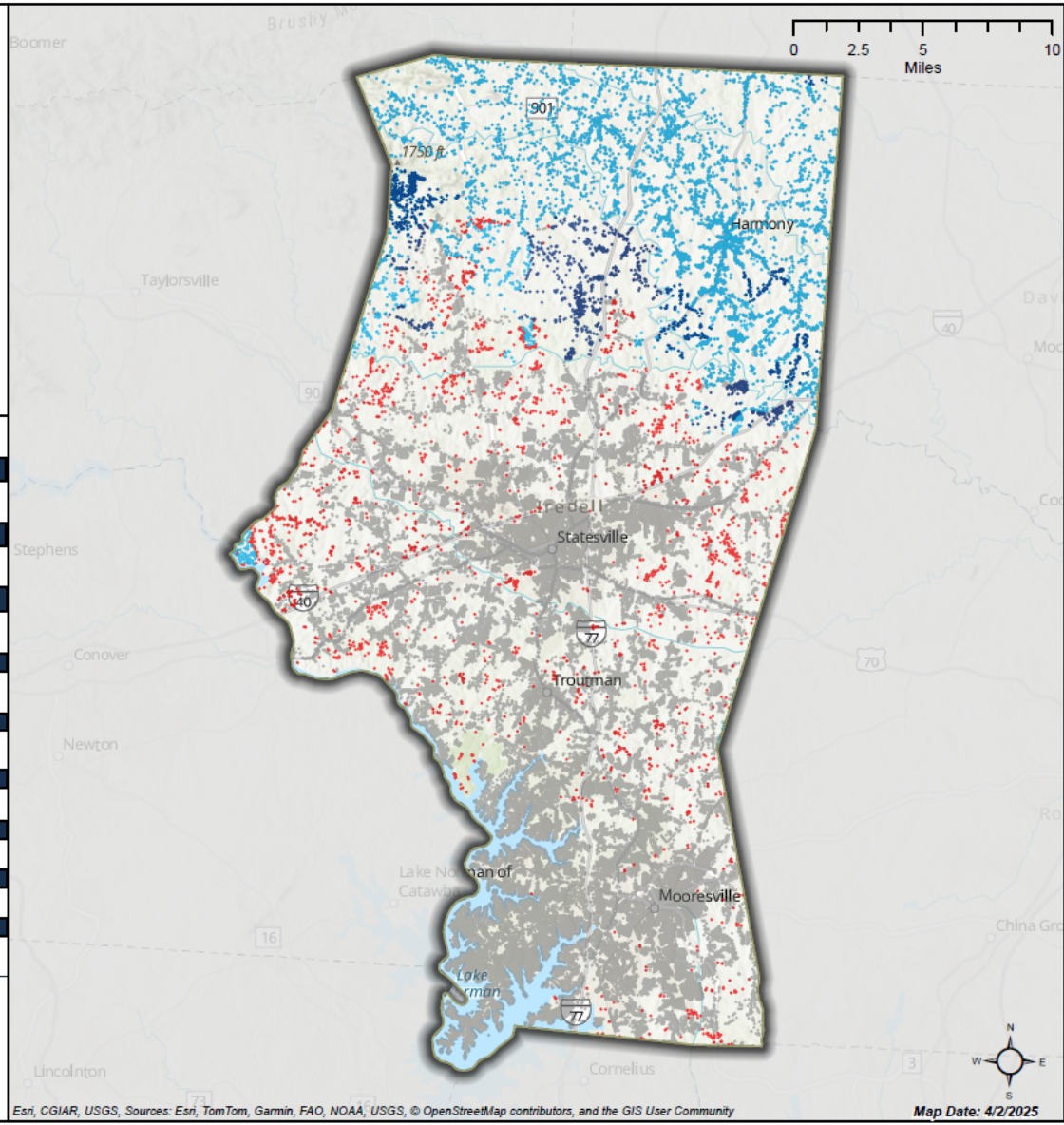
Local Award Locations

Unserved & Underserved Locations from the FCC Broadband Data Collection have been displayed on this map with funded locations overlaid. Locations that have had funds obligated through previous Federal, State or Local broadband expansion programs could be still unserved or underserved depending on the status of those projects and when the funds were obligated.

Unserved locations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs in NC are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service, through Fiber, Cable, or non-mobile Licensed Fixed Wireless technologies, of at least 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds. Underserved locations are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service of at least 100mb/s Download and 20mb/s Upload speeds, but greater than 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds.

IREDELL COUNTY STATISTICS	
Percent Served with Reliable Broadband*	
95.81%	77,067 Total Locations
Percent Unserved & Underserved *	
4.19 %	3,373 Total Locations
Locations Funded through State, Federal or Local Programs*	
8.74%	7,030 Total Locations
Percent with Fiber Broadband Available *	
48.44%	38,962 Total Locations
Percent with Cable Broadband Available*	
88.42%	71,125 Total Locations
Percent with DSL or Fixed Wireless Only *	
3.36%	2,702 Total Locations
Percent with Broadband Subscription **	
76.33%	
Percent with No Internet Access **	
7.93%	
Percent with No Internet Devices **	
6.49%	

DATA SOURCES:
*FCC BDC - Federal Communication Commission Broadband Data Collection Version 5 Published June 2024 (Provider Reported as of November, 2024)
Funded locations may be served, unserved, or underserved depending on when the project received funding and the requirements of the specific program.
**ACS - U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Map Date: 4/2/2025

Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Iredell County

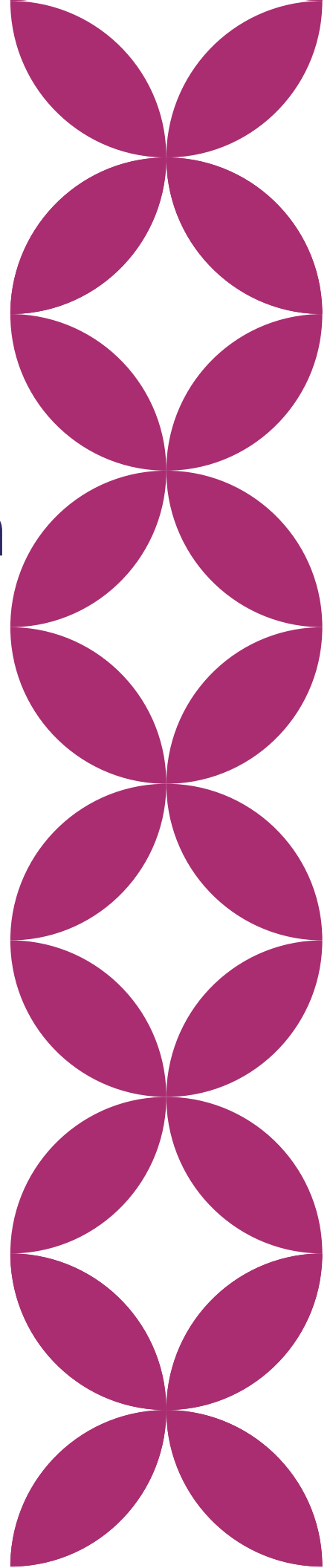
Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant

Zirrus – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Lincoln County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Lincoln County – Digital Opportunity Team

Davin Madden, Lincoln County Manager

Ben Cohen, Chief Information Officer

Powered by Centralina

The Lincoln County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Lincoln County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Lincoln and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at [Centralina.org/digital](https://centralina.org/digital), Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

Setting the Digital Scene

Located northwest of the Charlotte metro area, Lincoln County is a predominantly rural or suburban community anchored by the City of Lincolnton and located near major regional job hubs. The county's digital strengths include strong broadband coverage across most areas and growing access to cable and fiber networks. With ongoing growth in remote work and microbusiness activity, reliable digital access is essential to sustaining economic mobility and opportunity.

While many households are connected, gaps remain. Broadband subscription rates are lower than the regional average, and some neighborhoods still face limited device access or rely on mobile-only service. Targeted outreach, infrastructure expansion and training can help close these gaps and improve participation across all age groups and income levels.

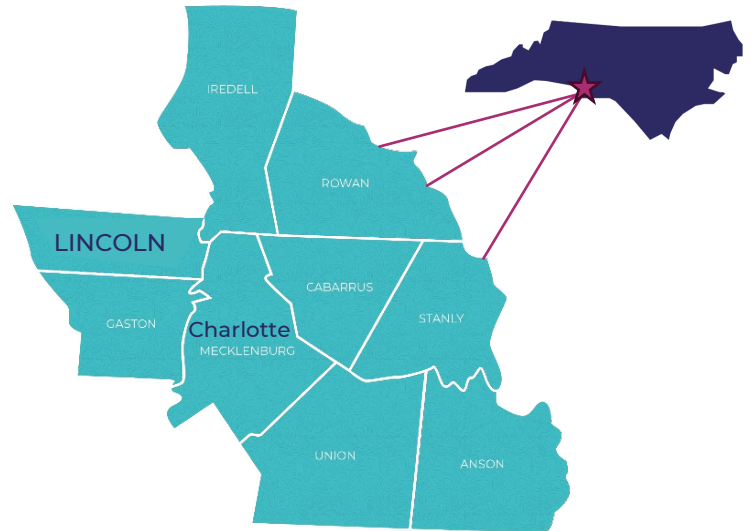
This plan outlines Lincoln County's key strategies to enhance connectivity, expand digital tools and support full participation in an increasingly digital economy.

Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Lincoln County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Lincoln NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

Metric	Centralina	Lincoln	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,382,365	97,611	Growing population indicates continued need for digital services
Percent with Reliable Broadband	73%	93%	Strong broadband coverage across most locations
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	9%	7%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	23%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	91%	Multiple providers offer competitive services
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	14%	5%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure

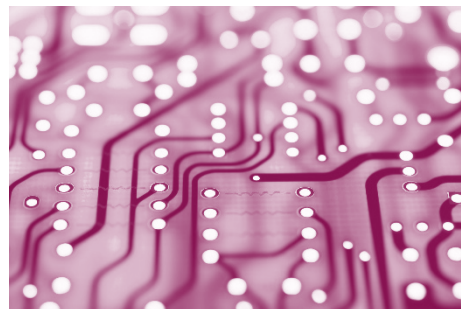
Centralina Region



Broadband Subscription Rate	91%	72%	High engagement, yet affordability remains a concern
Households Without Internet Access	7%	11%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	3%	9%	Device access remains a challenge for some households
Households with High Digital Stress	7%	7%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Support digital growth for small businesses and entrepreneurs
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Expand remote job training and access to match occupation potential

Assets and Connectivity

Lincoln County supports digital growth through a combination of public institutions, nonprofit partners and grant-supported initiatives (Appendix B). These assets are anchored by a developing digital infrastructure and a strong network of local organizations that expand access, deliver training and promote engagement. Together, they provide a solid foundation for continued outreach and community participation in the digital economy.



Libraries and Public Institutions: The Lincoln County Public Library system provides public Wi-Fi, computers and basic training to residents.

Education Partners: Gaston College serves Lincoln residents through workforce readiness programs and digital literacy training.

Broadband Providers: DSL and fixed wireless dominate rural areas, while fiber and cable are limited to select zones.

Public Safety Alerts: Local emergency management uses CodeRED for emergency notifications and updates.

Key Challenges

- Less than 20% of households can access fast fiber or cable broadband, limiting support for remote work, education and small businesses.
- About 23% of locations in Lincoln County remain unserved or underserved. These zones need targeted public and private investment.

- Though device access is better than regional averages, 7% of households experience digital stress — often relying solely on mobile data or lacking internet altogether.
- With a 16-point gap between remote-ready jobs and those working from home, training and access must better align to support remote careers.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Lincoln County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Charles R. Jonas-Lincoln County Public Library](#) - Offers the Northstar Digital Literacy online learning platform, one-on-one technical assistance with digital skills or devices and regularly scheduled workshops to enhance digital skills. For assistance call (704) 735-8044
 - Bilingual materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Two more locations throughout the county: West Lincoln and Florence S. Shanklin Branch Library in Denver
- [Gaston College Lincoln Campus](#) – Offers Northstar Digital Literacy online learning for students to improve their digital skills and provide the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 825-3737
 - Gaston College offers support services in Spanish to assist students
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [NCWorks Career Center -Lincoln](#) – Assists adults and dislocated workers by providing financial aid for approved training programs, including On-the-Job training and digital literacy. For assistance contact - (704) 735-8035
- [NCWorks Career Center – Lincoln - NextGen Services](#) offers Career readiness workshops that cover digital skills and educational training for young adults 16-24 years old. For assistance contact (704) 735-8035
- [Lincoln County Senior Center](#) – Offers digital skills assistance and classes in Lincoln. For information contact (704) 732-9053

- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704) 348-2708
Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region
- [Latin American Coalition](#) – Based in Charlotte and serves Lincoln County and offers digital literacy initiatives to the Latino community. For information call 704-531-3848

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
- [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income

Computer Access

- [Charles R. Jonas Lincoln County Public Library](#)- Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access
 - Florence S. Shanklin Branch Library in Denver and the West Lincoln Branch Library provides use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access
- [NCWorks Career Center-Lincoln](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance
- [Lincoln County Senior Services](#) – Provides public computers for Lincoln County residents 60 and older.
- [Lincoln County Schools \(LCS\)](#) – Provides each student K-12 with a digital device (704) 732-2261

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible for Anson County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), provides financial assistance for phone and internet services for eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [Smart911 Alerts](#) – Emergency alert program notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates, including severe weather, unexpected road closures, missing persons and evacuations of buildings and neighborhoods. [Register](#) on the Lincoln County website
- [Lincoln County Special Population Registry](#) - A voluntary list for residents with medical needs so emergency responders are aware and can assist during disasters or crisis. [Register](#) on Lincoln County's website or access a [printed version](#)
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Service provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts
- [Lincoln County Emergency Management](#) – Ongoing work to improve communication accessibility before, during and after hazardous events, especially for vulnerable populations
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents

prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs

Action Framework and RASCI Overview

The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting, consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supported – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Expand digital skills training for students and workers (Digital Skills Development)	Gaston College; Public Libraries; NCWorks; LCS; Nonprofits	Lincoln County	Gaston College; NCWorks; Centralina Workforce Development Board; Aging Agencies	Lincoln County Schools; Centralina Area Agency on Aging; Employers	Public
Enable more small businesses to access online markets through better broadband (Business Growth)	Internet Service Providers; Gaston College Small Business Center	Lincoln County	Public Libraries; City of Lincolnton	Lincoln Economic Development Association	Public
Extend internet infrastructure in rural zones (Increase Availability)	Internet Service Providers, County Planning Department	Lincoln County	NCDIT, Federal/ State Funders	Emergency Services	Public
Support emergency preparedness;	Lincoln County Emergency	Lincoln County (website,	Lincoln County Internet	Emergency Manage-	Public

telehealth and education through stronger internet infrastructure (Connected Communities)	Management, Sheriff dept; Health and Social service Providers; Lincoln County Schools	Smart911 Alerts, SMS messaging); Local government leadership; Energy providers	Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs	ment, Fire, EMS, 211	
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Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Lincoln County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
Improve Digital Skills	Increase workforce readiness and digital fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Number of digital workshops and residents trained (Gaston College, NCWorks, Libraries) -Number of jobseekers accessing digital tools (NCWorks) -Engagement with seniors (Centralina Area Council on Aging)
Expand Access to Devices	Grow access to digital tools for households and small businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Number of devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, LCS) -Public Wi-Fi usage (ISPs) -Tech access points (Libraries, NCWorks, LCS)
Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness	Ensure broad access to emergency communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of residents registered for Smart911 Alerts and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety workshops or outreach sessions delivered

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Lincoln County

To build on Lincoln County's digital progress, the following priority areas highlight where focused action can help expand access, strengthen skills and support economic growth across the community:

- Extend high-speed broadband to rural and growing neighborhoods
- Increase availability of discounted internet plans and devices
- Expand digital skills training through libraries and local colleges
- Promote remote worker training aligned with job market potential
- Support microbusinesses with online tools and e-commerce access
- Strengthen public safety communication channels and training

Conclusion

Lincoln County is well positioned to grow its digital capacity through focused efforts to reach rural homes, small businesses and underserved neighborhoods. With over 90% of residents subscribing to broadband where it is available, the demand is clear. By closing gaps in infrastructure, skills and device access, the county can unlock new economic growth and improve daily life for residents.

Ongoing collaboration between public partners, private providers and community organizations will be key to building a future-ready digital ecosystem. This plan represents the next step toward a connected, resilient and opportunity-rich Lincoln County.

Appendix A



LINCOLN COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.

●

Remaining Unfunded Unserved & Underserved Locations

●

Served Locations

●

Federal Funded Locations

●

State Funded Locations - GREAT & CAB

●

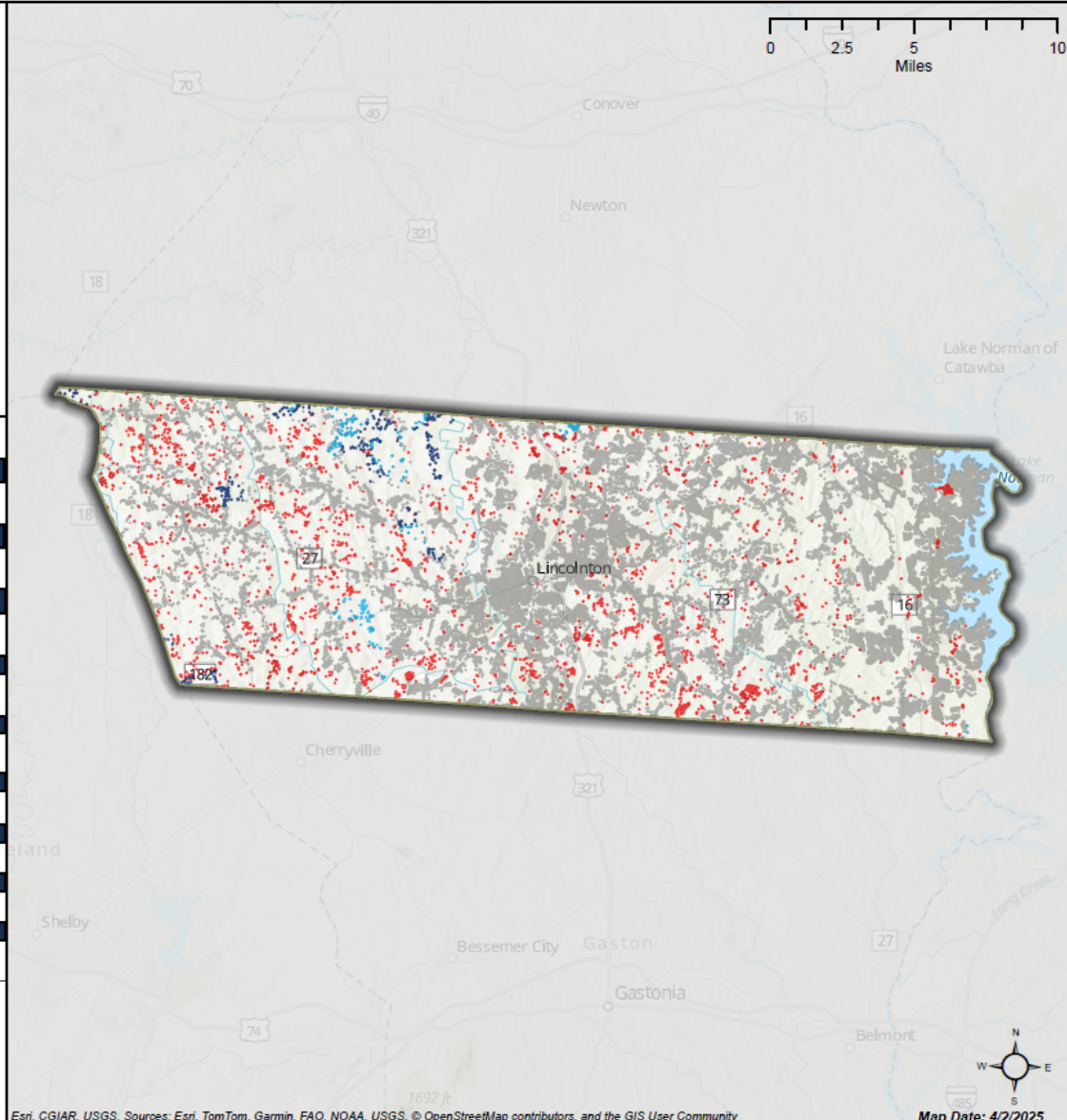
Local Award Locations

Unserved & Underserved Locations from the FCC Broadband Data Collection have been displayed on this map with funded locations overlaid. Locations that have had funds obligated through previous Federal, State or Local broadband expansion programs could be still unserved or underserved depending on the status of those projects and when the funds were obligated.

Unserved locations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded programs in NC are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service, through Fiber, Cable, or non-mobile Licensed Fixed Wireless technologies, of at least 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds. Underserved locations are defined as locations without access to fixed terrestrial internet service of at least 100mb/s Download and 20mb/s Upload speeds, but greater than 25mb/s Download and 3mb/s Upload speeds.

LINCOLN COUNTY STATISTICS	
Percent Served with Reliable Broadband*	
92.9%	37,723 Total Locations
Percent Unserved & Underserved *	
7.1 %	2,881 Total Locations
Locations Funded through State, Federal or Local Programs*	
1.42%	576 Total Locations
Percent with Fiber Broadband Available *	
23.43%	9,513 Total Locations
Percent with Cable Broadband Available*	
90.48%	36,738 Total Locations
Percent with DSL or Fixed Wireless Only *	
5.43%	2,205 Total Locations
Percent with Broadband Subscription **	
72.41%	
Percent with No Internet Access **	
10.73%	
Percent with No Internet Devices **	
8.55%	

DATA SOURCES:
*FCC BDC - Federal Communication Commission Broadband Data Collection Version 5 Published June 2024 (Provider Reported as of November, 2024)
Funded locations may be served, unserved, or underserved depending on when the project received funding and the requirements of the specific program.
**ACS - U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates



Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Lincoln County

Digital Champion Grant

Center for Digital Equity

Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.

Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Grant

Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline

Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.

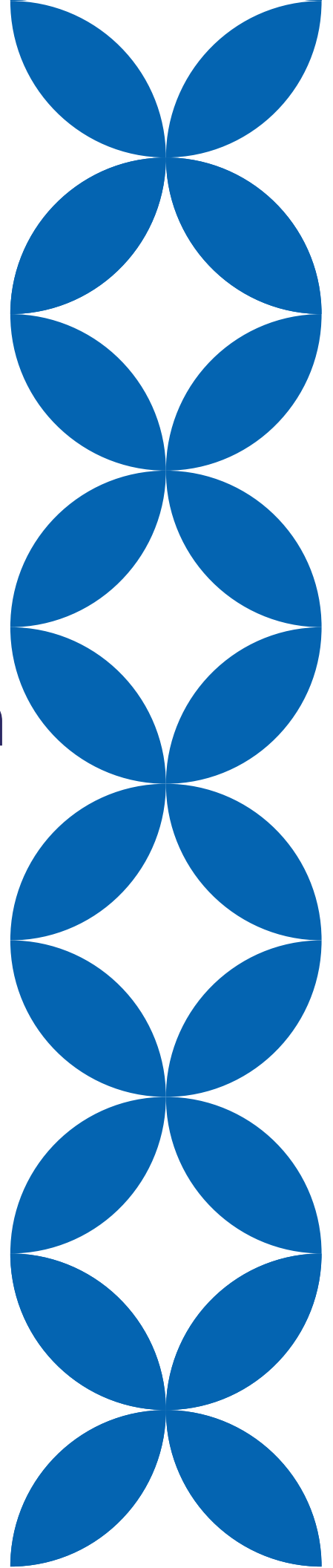
Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Public Safety Supplement for Digital Opportunity Plan

Mecklenburg County
July 2025



Strategic Goals and Local Resources

In January 2025, Mecklenburg County collaborated with key partners to develop and publish its own Five-Year Plan for digital opportunity, demonstrating strong local leadership and a clear commitment to expanding digital access. This plan was guided by the principles of digital equity and inclusion, which reflected common terminology at the time. For consistency with Centralina's regional approach and current language preferences, this report refers to all county and regional strategies as *Digital Opportunity Plans (DOP)*. The full Five-Year Plan is available on The Center for Digital Equity's [website](#).

While Mecklenburg's plan reflects priorities focused on its urban setting and community needs, Mecklenburg County remains a key part of the Centralina region's coordinated effort to improve broadband access, increase digital skills and support equitable economic growth across all counties. To complement Mecklenburg's plan and ensure alignment with the regionwide framework, Centralina includes a supplemental section with an added focus on public safety and emergency preparedness.

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

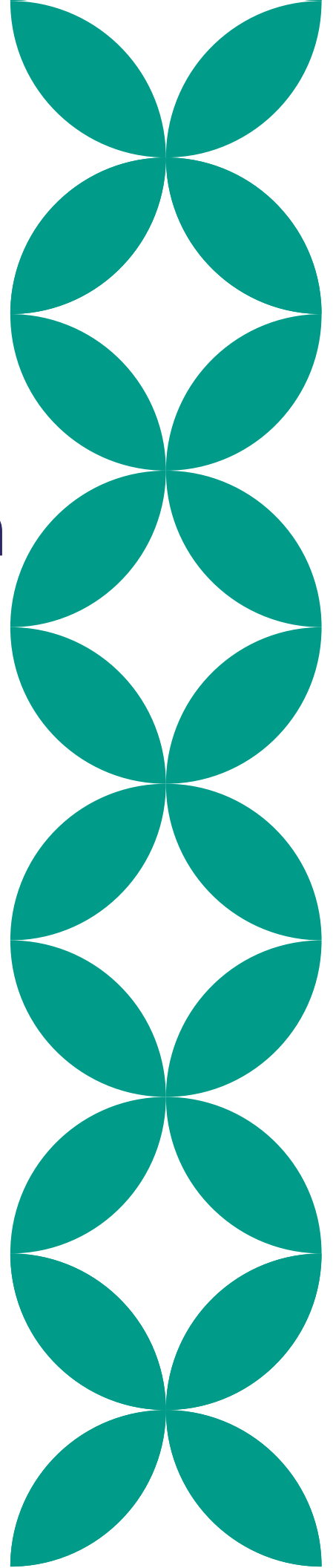
These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [CharMeck Alerts](#) –Emergency alert program notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates, including severe weather, unexpected road closures, missing persons and evacuations of buildings and neighborhoods. [Registration is online](#)
- [Safe Outcomes](#) – Offered by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, this voluntary registry equips officers with advance information to better support individuals with specific medical or developmental conditions during emergency responses. [Register](#) on the City of Charlotte website
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
- [CharMeck 311](#) – Residents can contact 311 by phone or [online](#) to connect with a digital navigator. No-cost support is available by phone, email or in person to help with signing up for affordable internet service, purchasing low-cost devices, learning digital skills and resolving basic connectivity or device issues.
- [Ready Mecklenburg](#) - a preparedness program led by Mecklenburg Emergency Management to educate residents about emergency response plans and digital tools.

- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations.
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Services provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts.
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts.
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Rowan County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Rowan County – Digital Opportunity Team

Aaron Church, Rowan County Manager

Randy Cress, Assistant County Manager/Chief
Information Officer

Ann Kitalong-Will, Director of Grants Administration &
Governmental Relations

Powered by Centralina

The Rowan County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Rowan County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

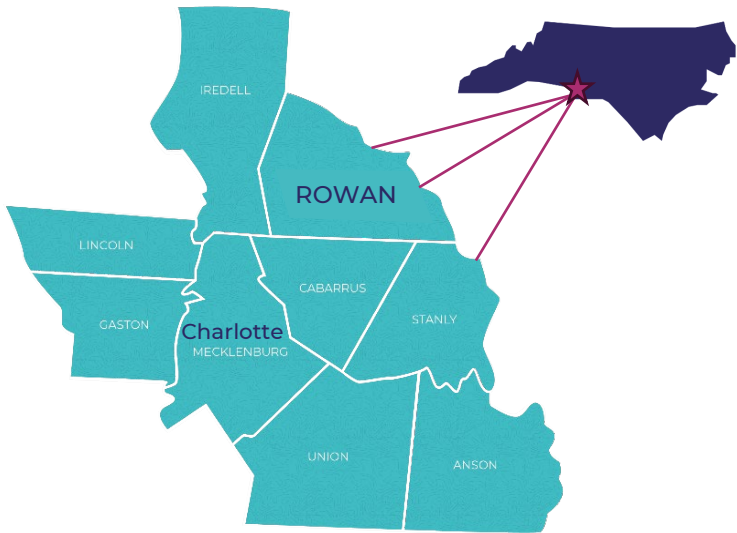
The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Rowan and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at [Centralina.org/digital](https://centralina.org/digital), Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

Setting the Digital Scene

Rowan County, located northeast of the Charlotte metro area, is a growing and dynamic community that blends small towns with rural neighborhoods and access to regional job hubs. The county has reliable broadband coverage across most areas and a solid mix of fiber and cable infrastructure. Population growth, rising microbusiness activity and remote work potential highlight the need to equip every household with the tools, connections and training to thrive in today's economy.

This plan builds on Rowan County's current assets, key digital metrics and priority strategies for expanding digital engagement across all communities. It supports the region's goals of improving access, affordability, digital skills and public safety communication.

Centralina Region



Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Rowan County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Rowan NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

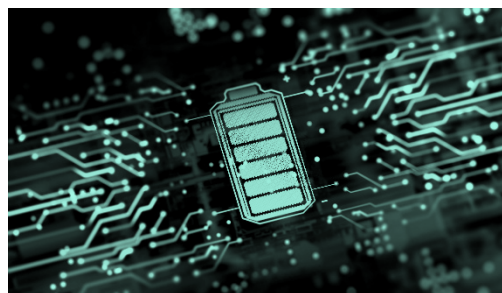
Metric	Centralina	Rowan	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,382,365	153,384	Growing population indicates continued need for digital services
Percent with Reliable Broadband	73%	94%	Strong broadband coverage across most locations
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	9%	6%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	46%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	91%	Multiple providers offer competitive services
Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	14%	5%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure
Broadband Subscription Rate	91%	72%	High engagement, yet affordability remains a concern

Households Without Internet Access	7%	13%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	3%	10%	Device access remains a challenge for some households
Households with High Digital Stress	7%	12%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	Support digital growth for small businesses and entrepreneurs
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Expand remote job training and access to match occupation potential

Assets and Connectivity

Rowan County is supported by a well-established digital infrastructure, a network of community institutions and grant supported initiatives that contribute to digital access and participation. The following assets provide a foundation for digital growth and outreach.

Libraries and Learning Centers: Rowan Public Library branches offer computer access, internet service and digital literacy workshops.



Training Providers: Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) and local nonprofits deliver digital skills programs including Northstar Digital Literacy.

Public Wi-Fi and Devices: Hotspot lending programs, public computer labs and device voucher initiatives help extend access.

Grant-Funded Broadband Expansion: State and federal programs such as GREAT and CAB grants are supporting buildout efforts in targeted areas. (See Appendix B for a list)

Key Challenges

- Small areas of the county remain unserved or underserved, particularly in rapidly growing suburban fringes and rural zones.
- Ten percent of households report having no internet-enabled devices and 12 percent experience high digital stress, relying only on mobile devices or having no internet at all.
- Five percent of households rely solely on DSL or fixed wireless options, limiting access to modern digital services.

- While subscription rates are high, there are still residents not connected due to cost barriers, especially in areas with outdated technology.
- Despite strong fiber coverage, there remains a gap between the availability of remote-friendly occupations and the share of residents working from home.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Rowan County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Rowan County Public Library](#) - Offers one-on-one technology assistance with digital devices and computers. For more information contact (980) 432-8670
 - Bilingual staff and materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Three more locations throughout the county offer assistance: East Branch in Rockwell, South Rowan Regional Library in China Grove and the West Branch in Cleveland
- [Rowan-Rowan Community College \(RCCC\)](#) - Offers Northstar Digital Literacy online learning for students to improve their digital skills and provide the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 290-5216
 - RCCC offers support services in Spanish to assist students
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [Catawba College](#) – Provides students with access to digital skill-building resources, including the Digital Learning Lab, which supports hand-on learning and technology-based training. For more information contact: (704) 645-4517
- [NCWorks Career Center - Rowan](#) – Assists adults and dislocated workers by providing financial aid for approved training programs, including On-the-Job training and digital literacy. For assistance contact - (704) 639-7529

- [NCWorks Career Center – Rowan - NextGen Services](#) offers Career readiness workshops that cover digital skills and educational training for young adults 16-24 years old. For assistance contact (704) 639-7529
- [Goodwill Career Center of Northwest NC](#) – Offers access to job readiness training including a digital technology academy and job search assistance. For information contact (704) 638-6434
- [Rufty-Holmes Senior Center](#) – Offers computer skills training and workshops. For more information contact (704) 216-7714
- [Rowan County Literacy Council](#) – Assist individuals with reading and writing and provide support for digital literacy skills as needed. For assistance contact (704) 216-8266
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704) 348-2708 Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region
- [Latin American Coalition](#) – Based in Charlotte and serves Rowan County and offers digital literacy initiatives to the Latino community. For information call 704-531-3848
- [Pathways NC, Inc.](#) – This community-focused organization provides accessible computer education and digital literacy programs, with an emphasis on serving senior citizens. Contact: info@pathwaysnc.com

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
- [Students in Training](#) – a non-profit organization in Granite Quarry offers a program called Computers in the Community and provides computers at no cost/low cost
- [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income

Computer Access

- [Rowan County Public Libraries](#)- Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access.
 - Rowan County Main Library in Salisbury
 - East Branch Library
 - South Branch Library
 - West Branch Library
- [NCWorks Career Center-Rowan](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance.
- [Goodwill Career Center of Northwest NC](#) – Offers public access to computers with internet service to assist jobseekers
- [Rufty-Holmes Senior Center](#) – Offers digital skills assistance and classes in Salisbury
- [Rowan-Salisbury School System](#) – Provides 1:1 iPad device program for students in grades K-12, ensuring every student has access to a personal digital device. Questions about devices (704) 296-3143

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible for Anson County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission , provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [Ready ROWAN](#) provides RoCo Alerts – Emergency alert program which notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates, including severe weather, road closures, missing persons and evacuations
[Registration is online](#)
- Special Needs Registry – Residents can use [Ready ROWAN](#) to register individuals with medical or functional needs, helping emergency responders provide timely support during disasters and emergencies.
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects
Centralina Regional Council | 112

individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162

- [NC Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network \(NC-FIMAN\)](#) - A statewide tool that provides real-time and forecasted flood data, maps and alerts based on rainfall and water levels. Users can view flooding impacts, plan for risks and sign up for email or text alerts for specific locations
- [NOAA](#) – The National Weather Services provides alerts on mobile phones, weather radios, TV and radio broadcasts
- [Rowan County Emergency Management](#) – Ongoing work to improve communication accessibility before, during and after hazardous events, especially for vulnerable populations.
- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs

Action Framework and RASCI Overview

The following RASCI table outlines the roles and responsibilities for implementing the four strategic goals of Expand Digital Literacy, Increase Device Ownership and Access, Improve Affordability of Broadband Services and Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access. It clarifies who is responsible, accountable, supporting, consulted and informed for each major activity associated with achieving this objective.

- Responsible – Leads on-the-ground implementation
- Accountable – Owns delivery of results
- Supporting – Provides funding, technical help, coordination
- Consulted – Offers input based on expertise
- Informed – Needs updates or may be affected by outcomes

Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Boost local workforce readiness for remote jobs and digital economy roles (Digital Skills Development)	RCCC; NCWorks; Nonprofits	Rowan County	RSS; Rowan Public Libraries; Non profits; NCWorks, Centralina Workforce Develop-	RSS; Aging Agencies; Employers	Public

			ment Board		
Expand device access and outreach (Increase Access)	E2D; RCCC; Kramden Institute; Public Libraries Nonprofits	Rowan County	Grant Foundations; RSS; Aging Services	Nonprofits	Public
Advance broadband expansion in underserved areas (Increase Availability)	Internet Service Providers	Rowan County	NCDIT, Federal/ State Funders	Emergency Services	Public
Support workforce and business use of digital tools (Business Growth)	Internet Service Providers; RCCC, RSS; Rowan Chamber	Rowan County	RCCC Small Business Center; Rowan EDC, Rowan Chamber	Employers; RSS	Public
Strengthen public education outreach and enrollment in emergency alerts (Connected Communities)	Rowan Emergency Management, Fire, Sheriff dept, Police, Public Information Office; Health Providers; RSS	Rowan County (website, RoCo Alerts, SMS Messaging); Rowan County Hazard Mitigation Task Force; Local government leadership; Energy providers	Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; Rowan County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs	Emergency Management, Fire, EMS, 211	Public

Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Rowan County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
Improve Digital Skills	Increase workforce readiness and digital fluency	-Number of digital workshops and residents trained (RCCC, NCWorks, Public Libraries) -Number of jobseekers accessing digital tools (NCWorks) -Engagement with seniors (Centralina Area Council on Aging)
Expand Access to Devices	Grow access to digital tools for households and small businesses	-Number of devices distributed (E2D, Kramden, RSS) -Public Wi-Fi usage (ISPs) -Tech access points (Libraries, NCWorks, RSS)
Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	-Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	- Number of residents registered for RoCo Alerts and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Rowan County

To build on Rowan County's digital progress, the following priority areas highlight where focused action can help expand access, strengthen skills and support economic growth across the community:

- Extend broadband to remaining unserved and underserved areas
- Support residents through device distribution and public computer access
- Expand digital skills training through libraries, RCCC and workforce partners
- Align workforce development with remote work and online business opportunities
- Promote public safety technology and encourage enrollment in emergency alert systems

Conclusion

Rowan County has laid the groundwork for expanding digital opportunity through strong infrastructure and engaged community assets. By aligning with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and focusing on strategic investments, the county is positioned to expand connectivity, support job readiness and promote digital participation for all residents.

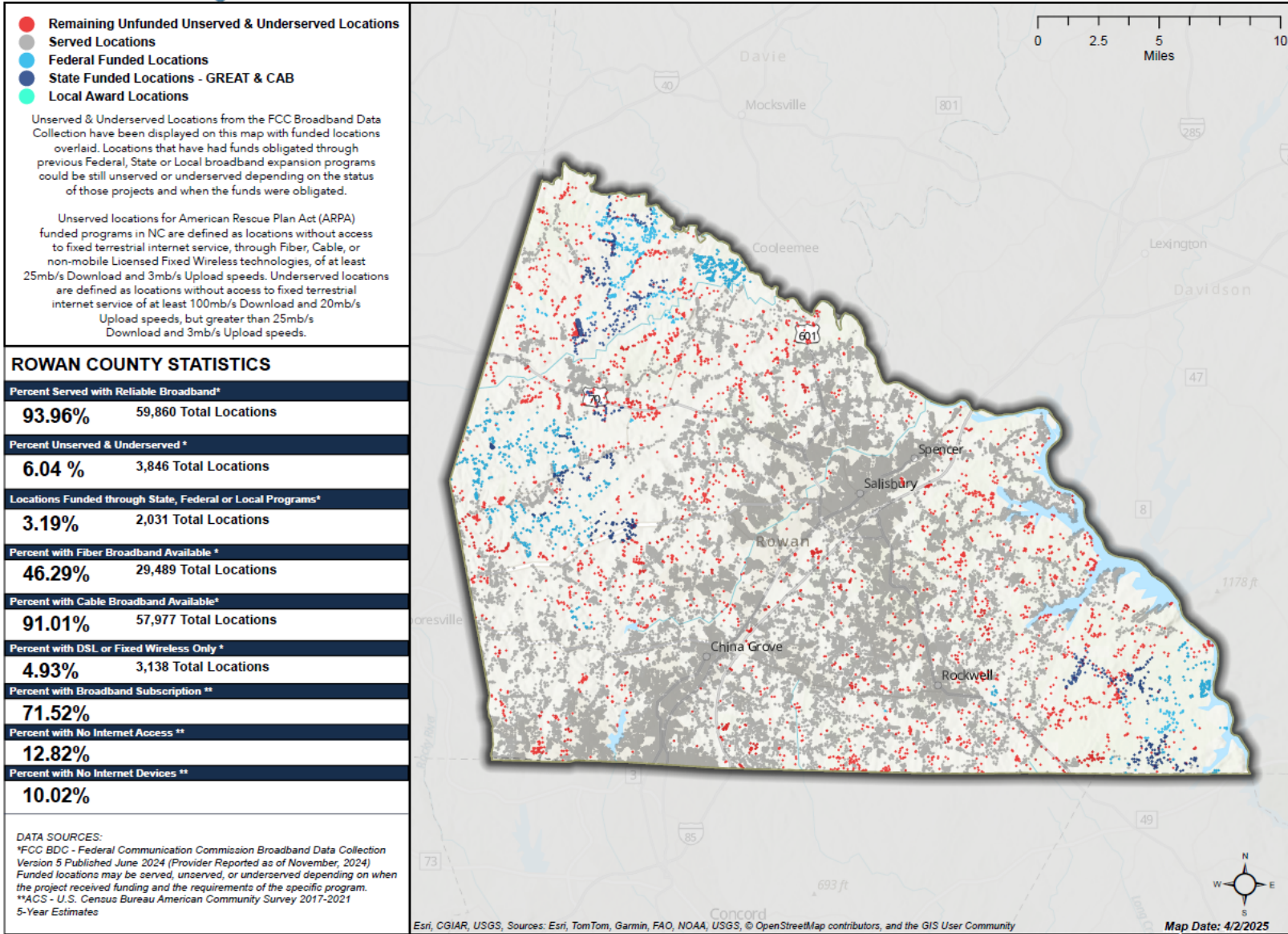
With continued collaboration and implementation, Rowan County will move toward a more connected and resilient future.

Appendix A



ROWAN COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.



Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Rowan County

[Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology \(GREAT\) Grant](#)

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

[Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology \(GREAT\) Grant 2022-2023](#)

Spectrum – 9/18/2025 construction deadline

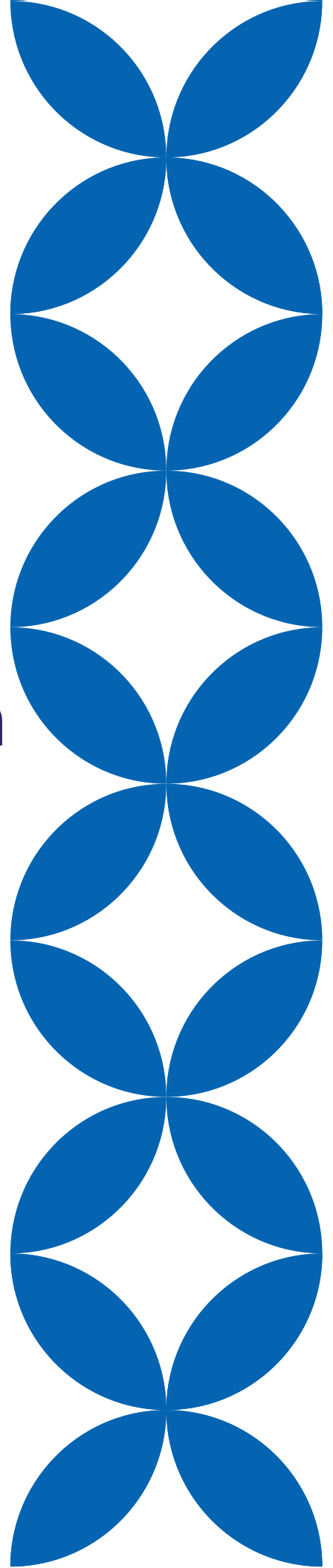
Provides grant funding to private broadband providers to support the expansion of service to areas of the state that currently lack broadband access.

Public Safety Supplement for Digital Opportunity Plan

Stanly County
July 2025



Water. Air. Land. Success.



Strategic Goals and Local Resources

Stanly County completed its Digital Opportunity Plan in April 2022, demonstrating early leadership and strong commitment to expanding digital access. Although developed ahead of the regional planning initiative, the county's work aligns with Centralina Regional Council's broader strategy to strengthen digital infrastructure, promote skill development and improve access to online services across the region. Review [Stanly County's Digital Inclusion Plan](#)

Stanly County's original document is titled *Stanly County Digital Inclusion Plan*, consistent with terminology used at the time of its publication. For consistency with Centralina's regional approach and to align with current language preferences, this report refers to all regional and county-level efforts such as *Digital Opportunity Plans*. The goals and content remain aligned across both efforts.

Stanly County remains an active partner in advancing digital opportunities across both urban and rural communities. Its Digital Plan and broadband data offer a strong foundation for addressing local needs through informed planning, strategic partnerships and continued investment in digital tools and training.

To complement Stanly's plan and ensure alignment with the regionwide framework, Centralina includes an additional supplement with emphasis on public safety and emergency preparedness.

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

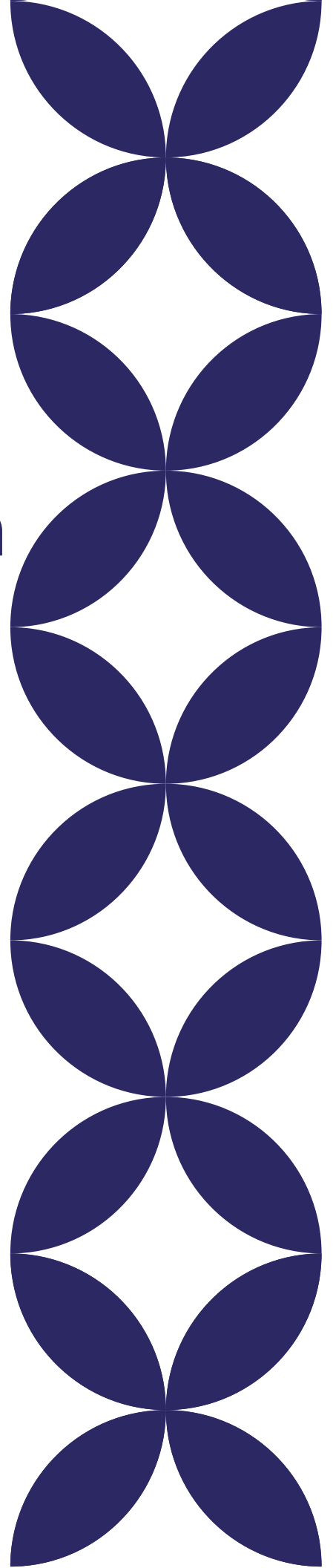
- [Stanly Alerts](#): Emergency alert program notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates, including severe weather, unexpected road closures, missing persons and evacuations of buildings and neighborhoods. [Register](#) on the Stanly County website
 - Special Needs Registry – Residents can use [Stanly Alerts](#) to register individuals with medical or functional needs, helping emergency responders provide timely support during disasters and emergencies.
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
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- [North Carolina Emergency Management \(NCEM\)](#) - Helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The agency supports local governments with planning, disaster response and recovery efforts
- [American Red Cross](#) - supports our community by providing emergency shelter, food, disaster relief and recovery services. They also help residents prepare for emergencies and connect them with resources for health and safety needs

As Stanly County continues to improve broadband access and digital literacy, integrating emergency communication tools ensures that all residents can stay connected, informed and prepared. These efforts contribute to a safer, more connected region and reinforce the role of digital infrastructure in protecting communities.

Digital Opportunity Plan

Union County
July 2025



Prepared by
Centralina Regional Council with funding from NCDIT
July 2025

Union County – Digital Opportunity Working Group

Jon Amelio, Director, Information Technology

Megan Parks, Director of Strategy and Innovation

Union County Broadband Committee

Powered by Centralina

The Union County Digital Opportunity Plan (DOP) is part of a coordinated regional strategy led by the Centralina Regional Council (Centralina) to ensure that all residents across the region have the tools, knowledge and infrastructure to fully participate in the digital world. The regional vision supports thriving communities, resilient systems and broader economic opportunity.



Alignment with the Centralina Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

Union County's plan aligns directly with Centralina's four regional digital opportunity goals:

- Improve Digital Literacy
- Expand Device Access
- Increase Affordability of Internet and Devices
- Strengthen Public Safety through Digital Preparedness

The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan and individual county plans were made possible through support from the [Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina](#) (BAND-NC) grant program, administered by the [Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University](#). Funding from BAND-NC enabled the [Centralina Regional Council](#) to lead a coordinated effort across the region, working in partnership with Union and eight other counties. Centralina developed a regional framework to strengthen digital access, improve device ownership, expand digital skills and promote public safety communications. Through county-specific strategies and a regional digital resource hub at Centralina.org/digital, Centralina is helping communities act to close gaps in broadband availability, affordability and awareness, while building a stronger foundation for workforce growth and economic opportunity across the Centralina region.

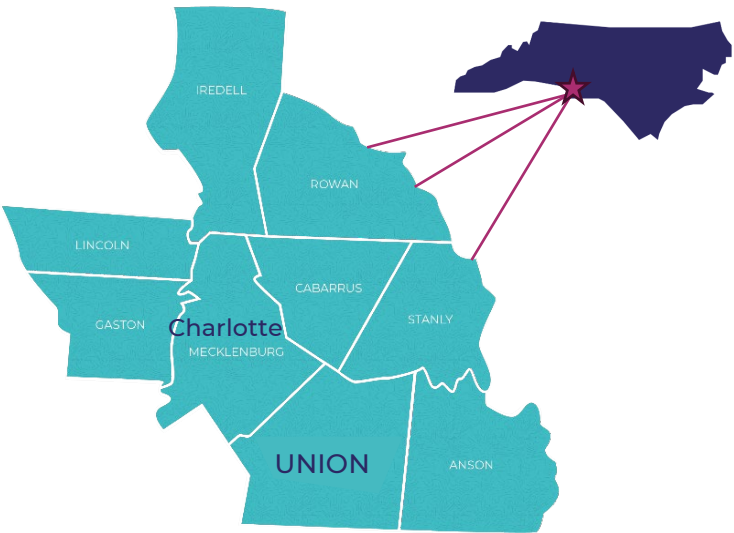
Setting the Digital Scene

Union County, located southeast of Charlotte in the Centralina region, holds strong assets in workforce, education and healthcare. Although broadband infrastructure is available to approximately 93% of residents in the county, there are still important opportunities to improve affordability, access to devices and digital readiness, especially in rural and lower-income communities.

Digital access supports Union County's goals for educational attainment, workforce competitiveness and community resilience. Local leaders recognize that targeted investments in training, broadband service, and outreach are needed to ensure that all residents and businesses benefit from modern technology.

This plan outlines Union County's strategic approach to improving digital access for all residents and businesses.

Centralina Region



Key Highlights

The following table summarizes key digital access indicators for Union County, highlighting current conditions and areas of opportunity that inform the county's strategic goals. See Appendix A for the Union NCDIT Broadband Profile Map.

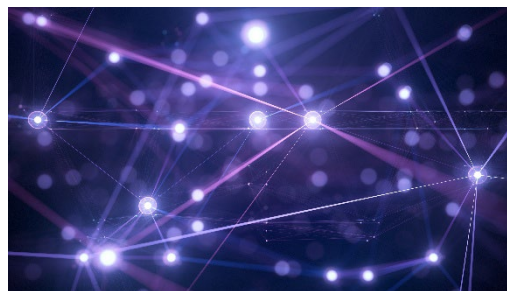
Metric	Centralina	Union	Opportunity Insight
Population (2024)	2,503,720	263,386	Population growth presents opportunities to scale digital infrastructure and services.
Percent with Reliable Broadband	89%	93%	Coverage is strong, but access to faster speeds still varies by location.
Locations that are Unserved or Underserved	11%	7%	Focused efforts needed to reach these areas
Fiber Broadband Available	43%	34%	High potential for gigabit speeds and future-proof infrastructure
Cable Broadband Available	86%	90%	Multiple providers offer competitive services

Dependent on DSL or Fixed Wireless Broadband Only	10%	6%	Small pockets of population still dependent on outdated infrastructure
Broadband Subscription Rate	73%	80%	High subscription rate signals strong participation with room for outreach
Households Without Internet Access	10%	6%	Outreach and affordability programs can close this remaining gap
Households Without Internet Devices	8%	5%	Device access remains a challenge for some households
Households with High Digital Stress	10%	7%	Some areas indicate residents lack devices and rely solely on cellular data or have no internet access
Microbusiness Density (Entrepreneurs)	Continued Growth	Growing	High potential for supporting local entrepreneurship through digital tools and training
Remote Work Potential Gap	Continued Growth	Future	Enhance digital skills and broadband access to close the usage gap

Assets and Connectivity

Union County has a strong base of partners and infrastructure supporting digital progress. A combination of public institutions, service providers and regional collaborations enhances current connectivity and continue the groundwork for future growth.

Libraries: The Union County Library system offers public Wi-Fi, computer access and digital literacy programming.



Digital Training Programs: South Piedmont Community College (SPCC), NCWorks and nonprofit partners support workforce development and remote work readiness.

Public Safety Alerts: The UC Alerts system keeps residents informed during emergencies and hazard events.

Broadband Infrastructure: Coverage reaches 93 percent of locations, with continued growth in fiber and cable availability.

Digital Grants: State programs like the Digital Champion, CAB and GREAT Grants have been awarded to expand broadband access in unserved areas. (See Appendix B for a list)

Device Access and Outreach: Community programs and partnerships support low-cost device distribution and digital readiness efforts.

Key Challenges

Union County has made strong progress in digital connectivity, yet several challenges remain that impact full participation in online services and economic opportunity:

- **Uneven Access to Fast Speeds:** While 93 percent of households are covered by reliable broadband, 7 percent of locations still fall below the 100/20 Mbps benchmark. Focused investment is needed to upgrade these areas and ensure consistent access countywide.
- **Fiber Availability Lagging Behind Demand:** With only 34 percent of locations having access to fiber broadband, Union County trails the regional average. Expanding fiber will help deliver faster, more reliable service and support long-term digital needs.
- **Device Access Gaps:** Five percent of households lack internet-enabled devices, which limit access to remote work, education and telehealth. These gaps call for continued investment in device distribution and digital literacy.
- **Persistent Digital Stress:** Approximately 7 percent of households experience high digital stress, meaning they rely only on cellular data or have no internet or computing devices. These conditions reduce the ability to access online resources and services.
- **Outreach and Adoption Needs:** Although 80 percent of households subscribe to broadband, this is lower than the regional average of 91 percent. Outreach, affordability campaigns and multilingual support can help raise adoption rates.
- **Remote Work Alignment:** The county shows future opportunity to close the gap between remote work-ready occupations and actual participation. Digital skills training and targeted infrastructure can help more residents tap into remote job markets.

Strategic Goals and Local Resources

To address these challenges and continue to advance digital opportunities, Union County has identified four strategic goals focused on expanding digital literacy, improving device access, increasing broadband affordability and strengthening public safety communications. The following section outlines these goals and highlights the local organizations and programs actively working to support residents and businesses in achieving them.

Goal 1: Expand Digital Literacy

The following resources and partners provide essential training and support to build digital skills throughout the community.

- [Union County Main Public Library](#) in Monroe - Offers one-on-one technical assistance with phone, tablet or laptop and computer classes to enhance digital skills. For assistance call (704) 283-8184
 - Bilingual staff and materials are available to support Spanish-speaking individuals
 - Adaptive technology and resources are available to support individuals with disabilities
 - Three more branch locations throughout the county offer digital support services including:
 - Lois Morgan Edwards Memorial Library in Marshville
 - Union West Regional Library in Indian Trail
 - Southwest Regional Library in Waxhaw
- [South Piedmont Community College \(SPCC\)](#) – Offers no cost digital literacy classes providing the fundamentals for widely used computer programs. For more information call (704) 290-5216
 - SPCC offers support services in Spanish to assist students
 - Accessibility services are available to support students with disabilities
- [Monroe Community Active Adult Center](#) - Offers weekly opportunities for technology assistance, helping residents improve their computer skills and troubleshoot common device issues. For assistance contact (704) 282-4500
- [Centralina Area Agency on Aging \(AAA\)](#) – Participates in the Digital Navigation Program and can help with technology and training for older adults. Contact the Aging Program Coordinator – (704) 348-2708 Centralina AAA provides accessible services and resources to Spanish-speaking individuals in the region
- [Center for Digital Equity \(CDE\)](#) – Union County has partnered with CDE to improve the digital infrastructure and bridge the digital divide. Contact CDE via an [online form](#)
- [Latin American Coalition](#) – Based in Charlotte and serves Union County and offers digital literacy initiatives to the Latino community. For information call (704) 531-3848

Goal 2: Increase Device Ownership and Access

The following programs and organizations help expand access to affordable digital devices, ensuring more residents can connect to online resources and services.

- [E2D](#) (Eliminate the Digital Divide) - A nonprofit organization based in Davidson, NC, committed to closing the digital divide by refurbishing
- Centralina Regional Council | 128

- donated laptops and providing them to those in need. The organization actively seeks opportunities to collaborate with communities and identify distribution points to expand its reach and impact. Contact (704) 657-0408
- [Kramden Institute](#) – A Durham-based nonprofit serving across North Carolina, provides underserved communities with refurbished devices and cell phones. For information on this program contact (919) 293-1133
 - [PCs for People](#) – A nonprofit organization that works to provide low-cost, quality computers and internet services to individuals and households. To place an order, customers must currently be participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income
 - [South Piedmont Community College](#) – Participants who complete the digital literacy classes receive a \$250 voucher to use toward the purchase of a digital device. Contact: (704) 290-5216

Computer Access

- [Union County Public Libraries](#)- Provides patrons with the use of public computers, internet and Wi-Fi access.
 - Lois Morgan Edwards Memorial Library
 - Union West Regional Library
 - Waxhaw Library
- [NCWorks Career Center-Union](#) – Offers public computers with internet service for those in need of employment or career guidance.
- [Union County Public Schools \(UCPS\)](#) – Provides 1:1 laptop to students grades 6-12. Questions about devices (704) 296-3143

Goal 3: Improve Affordability of Broadband Services

The following resources and partners support efforts to make broadband services more affordable and accessible to Union County residents.

- [Lifeline Program](#): Managed by the Federal Communications Commission , provides financial assistance for phone and internet services to eligible low-income subscribers. Call the Support Center: (800) 234-9473
- [Windstream](#) participates in this program
- [Spectrum Internet Assist](#): Provides a low-cost internet plan for qualifying households. Spectrum Customer Service (888) 369-2408
- [AT&T Access Program](#): Offers discounted internet services to eligible households. AT&T Customer Service (855) 220-5211

Goal 4: Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access

These programs and partners help expand public safety communications, ensuring residents can stay informed and connected during emergencies.

- [UC Alerts](#) – Emergency alert program notifies residents about emergencies and important community updates, including severe weather, unexpected road closures, missing persons and evacuations of buildings and neighborhoods. [Registration](#) is available on the Union County website.
 - [Special Populations Registry](#) – A voluntary list for residents with medical needs so emergency responders are aware and can assist during disasters or crisis. [Registration](#) is available on the Union County website. The registry form is offered in English, Spanish and Russian
- [NC 211](#) – No cost, confidential and multilingual information and referral services are provided by United Way of North Carolina. This connects individuals to health and human services within their communities. For assistance dial 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162
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Objective	Responsible	Accountable	Supported	Consulted	Informed
Boost local workforce readiness for remote jobs and digital economy roles (Digital Skills Development)	SPCC; Public Libraries; NCWorks; UCPS School System		NCWorks; Centralina Workforce Development Board; Aging Agencies; Other Funders	Employers UCPS; Aging Agencies; Employers; Union County	Public
Enable more small businesses to access online markets through better broadband (Business Growth)	Internet Service Providers; Union County Chamber		SPCC Small Business Center	SPCC Small Business Center; Union County	Public
Prepare local workers for remote and technology-driven careers (Workforce Resilience)	SPCC; NCWorks		Centralina Workforce Development Board, SPCC	Employers UCPS; Union County	Public
Support emergency preparedness; telehealth and education through stronger internet infrastructure (Connected Communities)	Union County Emergency Management, Sheriff dept; Health and Social service providers; UCPS	Union County (website, UC Alerts, SMS messaging); Local government leadership; Energy providers	Centralina; Internet Service Providers; National Weather Service; Red Cross; County Communications; Public Libraries; Aging Programs	Emergency Management, Police, Fire, EMS, 211	Public

Implementation Metrics

Tracking specific outcome metrics will help Union County measure progress toward expanding digital access, improving skills and strengthening community resilience.

These indicators focus on participation, adoption and infrastructure improvements across the four strategic goals.

Goal	Objective	Sample Outcome Metrics
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Increase Internet Affordability	Encourage enrollment in affordable internet plans	-Number of residents enrolled in Lifeline program -Number of outreach sessions held
Strengthen Public Safety Awareness and Access	Support emergency preparedness, telehealth and education with stronger internet infrastructure	- Number of residents registered for UC Alerts and SMS messaging services - Number of public Wi-Fi access points established or promoted for emergency use - Number of public safety workshops or outreach sessions delivered

Priority Areas for Digital Growth in Union County

To build on Union County's digital progress, the following priority areas highlight where focused action can help expand access, strengthen skills and support economic growth across the community:

- Extend broadband to focused areas of underserved neighborhoods
- Expand device distribution to households with low technology access
- Increase training focused on remote work and technology-enabled careers
- Partnering with emergency services to broaden alert system enrollment and awareness
- Supporting microbusinesses with connectivity and training to scale operations

Conclusion

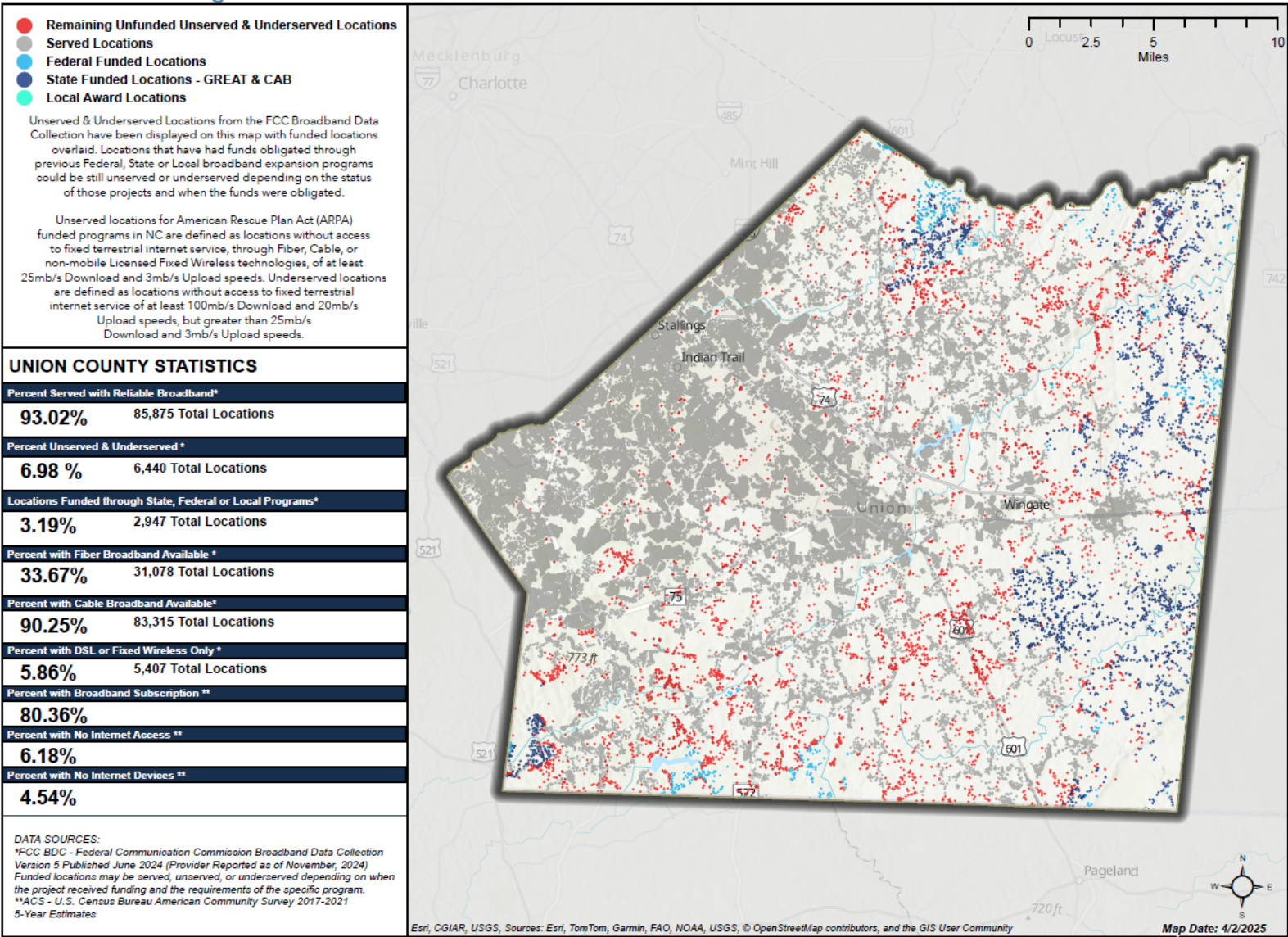
Union County is well-positioned to enhance digital participation by building on its fiber-ready infrastructure, active training partners and strong broadband subscription rates. This plan provides a foundation for future progress through targeted outreach, cross-sector collaboration and alignment with regional goals. By advancing broadband access, device support, digital learning and emergency readiness, Union County is taking important steps to strengthen its workforce and economy in today's connected world.

Appendix A



UNION COUNTY BROADBAND PROFILE

Summary of broadband status in the county based on FCC reported service compared with currently obligated funding programs focusing on improving broadband in the county.



Appendix B

NCDIT Grant Awards Received in Union County

Digital Champion Grant

[South Piedmont Community College Foundation](#)

Expanding internet access, providing digital devices and offering comprehensive digital literacy education to students with the skills needed for success in today's digital world.

[Center for Digital Equity](#)

Increasing equitable access to and adoption of digital tools, skills and support services by training and deploying digital navigators, distributing no or low-cost devices for residents and conducting needs assessments to track participant growth.

[Completing Access to Broadband \(CAB\) Grant](#)

Windstream - 10/31/2026 construction deadline

Funding for installation and operation of broadband infrastructure in targeted project areas identified by the county.

[Completing Access to Broadband \(CAB\) Grant part 2](#)

Windstream and Charter (Spectrum) - 10/31/2026 construction deadline

Received funding to expand broadband service to 1,200 additional locations in Union County.

[Growing Rural Economies Access to Technology \(GREAT\) Grant](#)

Spectrum – 4/10/2025 construction deadline

Provides funding to private sector broadband providers to deploy last-mile broadband infrastructure to unserved areas identified by the county.

Next Steps for the Centralina Region

Digital opportunity is no longer a luxury, is a necessity for thriving communities, resilient systems, and economic growth. The Centralina Digital Opportunity Plan, along with each county's individual strategy, offers a practical roadmap to guide local action, foster collaboration and close the digital divide across our region.

Every Centralina county has identified both strengths and opportunities. Now is the time to build on this foundation. We encourage local leaders, organizations and residents to treat these plans as a guiding strategy, informing decisions and evolving with community needs.

To support this ongoing work, Centralina Regional Council hosts the Digital Resource Hub, a central platform where all county plans, updates and tools are available in one place.

Explore the Hub at www.centralina.org/digital

We invite you to use this resource to stay informed, connect with partners and take action toward a more connected digital future. Together, we can transform digital opportunities into a lasting regional impact.

Digital Opportunity Resource Guide

Powered by Centralina Regional Council

The following index provides source acknowledgments for data, tools and organizations referenced in the Digital Opportunity Plan for Lincoln County. These resources informed strategies to expand broadband, strengthen digital skills and improve access.

Data Sources

- U.S. Census Bureau – 2017–2021 American Community Survey (5-Year Estimates)
Used for household-level data on internet access, devices, income, education, age groups and more.
<https://www.census.gov>
 - Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – Broadband Data Collection & Lifeline Program
Used to assess provider-reported broadband coverage and affordability program details.
<https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov>
<https://www.lifelinesupport.org>
 - Speedtest by Ookla – 2021 Global Fixed Network Performance Maps
Provided average upload and download speeds by geography.
<https://www.speedtest.net>
 - Lightcast (formerly EMSI) – Occupational and industry data
Used to measure digital economy jobs, skills demand and remote work potential.
<https://lightcast.io>
 - GoDaddy Venture Forward – Microbusiness Density Data
Used to identify digital entrepreneurship potential in rural and suburban communities.
<https://www.ventureforward.com>
 - Purdue Center for Regional Development – Digital Divide Index (DDI), Internet Income Ratio (IIR), Digital Distress
Custom indicators used to highlight areas of greatest need and opportunity.
<https://pcrd.purdue.edu>
 - National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) – Remote work occupation classifications
Informed remote work gap analyses across counties.
<https://www.nber.org>
-

Program and Toolkit References

- Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI), NC State University – BAND-NC Grant Program
Funded county-level planning and regional coordination for digital opportunity.
<https://iei.ncsu.edu/band-nc>
 - NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) – Broadband Profiles, GREAT Grants, CAB Awards
Provided detailed maps and county funding status.
<https://www.ncbroadband.gov>
 - E2D (Eliminate the Digital Divide) – Device distribution for students and families
<https://www.e-2-d.org>
 - Kramden Institute – Refurbished computers and digital training
<https://kramden.org>
 - PCs for People – Low-cost internet and devices for income-eligible households
<https://www.pcsforpeople.org>
-

Emergency Communication and Public Safety Sources

- NC Department of Public Safety – Emergency Alert System (EAS) State Plan
Outlines the structure and process for delivering emergency alerts in North Carolina.
<https://www.ncdps.gov/documents/files/north-carolina-emergency-alert-system-state-plan/open>
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – Emergency Alert System Overview
Provides guidance on national and state-level emergency alerting systems.
<https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-alert-system>
- National Weather Service (NWS) – NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards
Covers radio frequencies and service coverage for emergency weather alerts.
<https://www.weather.gov/nwr/>